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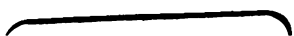
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SHE SAID:

BY  
ANNIE THOMAS.





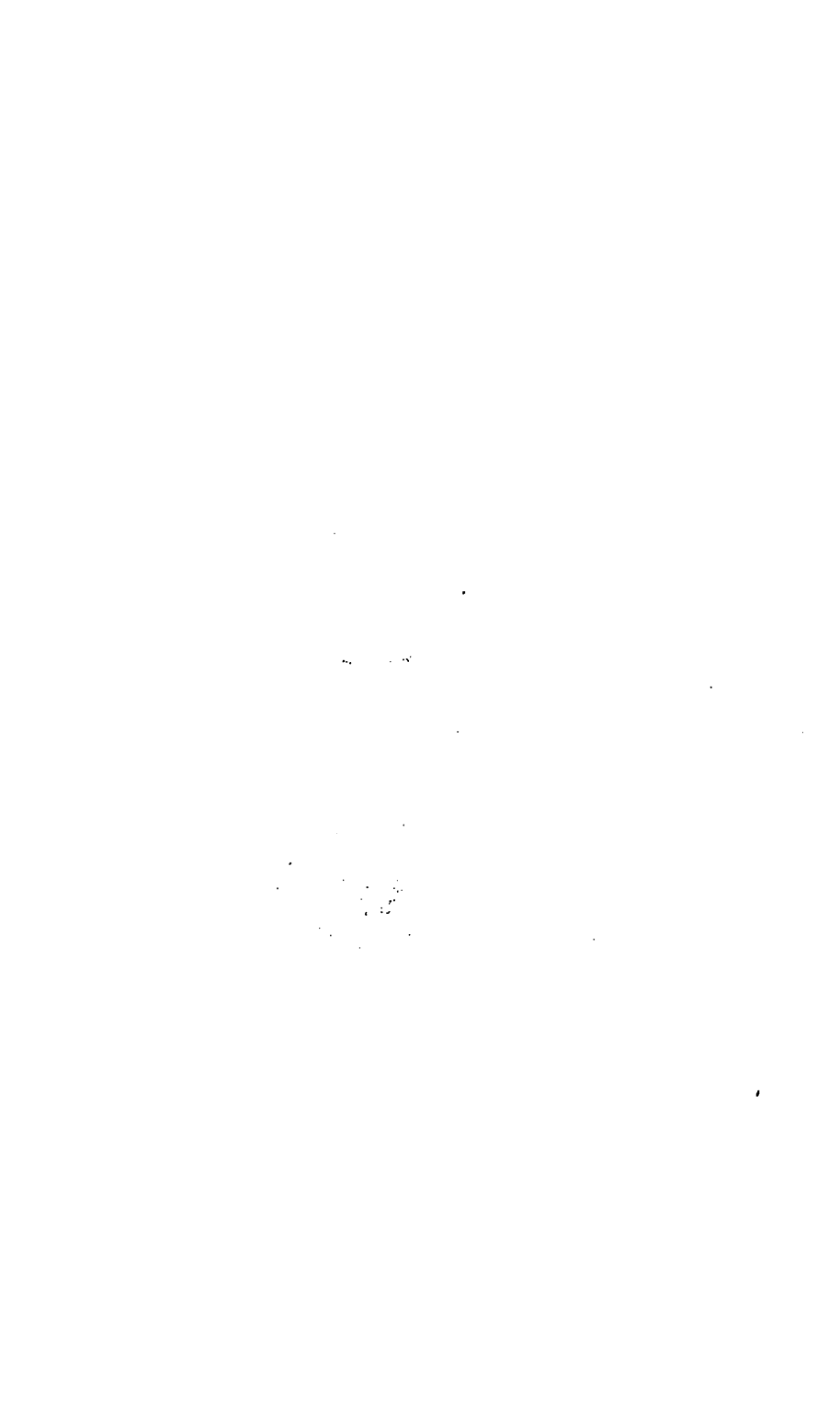
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**“‘HE COMETH NOT,’ SHE SAID.”**



# “‘HE COMETH NOT,’ SHE SAID.”

BY

ANNIE THOMAS

(MRS. PENDER CUDLIP),

AUTHOR OF “DENIS DONNE,” “PLAYED OUT,” “DOWER HOUSE,”  
“A PASSION IN TATTERS,” &C. &C.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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“‘HE COMETH NOT,’ SHE SAID.”

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## CHAPTER I.

“HE WILL RETURN, I KNOW HIM WELL.”


THERE is no going back after this for Madge and Philip Fletcher. No possibility of their resuming their former relations, after that flash of truth has irradiated Madge’s mind. Philip, with a vivid remembrance of the Moorbridge estate, and all the honour, and glory, and luxury the Moorbridge estate represents, would make a struggle to obliterate the impression, and have everything as it was before. But he reads in Madge’s face

and Madge's manner that the struggle would be a futile one. And with a biting sense of failure upon him, he lays Olive's letter down.

"I can't read it now," he mutters, and his head is bent, and his eyes are fixed on the floor, and he knows for all these averted looks that Madge is not the least bit in the world angry with him. He feels that she is full of pity for him, and somehow this pity galls him, and tries him very hardly.

"And now I know that you must have loved her like this before ever you saw me. Poor, poor Philip, and poor Olive, how awful for her."

The compassionate accents, the entire abnegation of Madge's own right to his love and loyalty, make him wince. He can't speak, or at anyrate he does not attempt to speak, he only blinks away two tears that



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will provokingly enough well up and blur his vision.

Madge has risen from the sofa, where she had been seated by his side, and now she has placed herself on a low chair just in front of him. There is in her manner nothing but such confidence and friendliness, that it makes Philip feel positively abject. He feels that she is not angry with him for having preferred another girl to herself. He knows that every other part of his conduct is condoned save this—that loving as he does he would have married *her*.

“I wish you could make up your mind to read Olive’s letter,” Madge says, presently ; there’s no complaint in it, but, oh ! (with a shudder) when you find what she’s been obliged to do, poor darling, your blood will boil—mine does.”

He looks up at this, eagerly, questioningly.

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"Has she married?" he asks, finding his voice at last.

"Married! no, gone into a show-room as a——"

She is checked by a sigh of relief from him.

"Did you know that and keep it from me, Philip?" with quick discernment. Then, as he does not answer, she adds, "I wish you would try to tell me the——;" she is on the verge of saying "the truth," but substitutes the words "all about it," instead.

He tells her something, he tells her many things about it. But he does not tell her "all," or nearly all, that there is to tell about poor infatuated Olive and himself. But to so much of his story as it pleases him to narrate, Madge listens with her heart in her eyes, and her mind busily at work.

"Poor, poor Olive! fancy you're meeting

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her by accident in town, and you two being obliged to be cool, and constrained, and conventional in your behaviour to each other.”

“Poor Madge,” might be said with greater accuracy, if she had only known how little coolness, or constraint, or conventionality there had been in that intercourse of theirs about which she so besprinkled them with pity. “Philip,” earnestly, “you can’t let this go on now?”

“Do you mean to say that you will have done with me altogether because of this?” he asks; “I have assured you that it is a thing over and done with.”

“Your love for Olive over and done with, is that what you mean?”

“Yes,” he says, but his voice quails as he utters the lie.

“Oh! Philip, how can you tell me so? why do you say so when you must feel that I




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know better ? Philip, I couldn't marry a man in whose face I'd seen such love for another woman as I saw just now in yours for Olive." Madge grows scarlet as she says this ; but he well understands that it is not jealousy which is forcing the blood to her brow and cheeks. It is not jealousy, it is some far finer feeling.

"It costs you very little to turn down this page in the book of your life for ever, apparently," he says, bitterly.

"No ; it costs me more than it will you, Philip," she says, frankly ; "even now I'm tingling with a foreshadowing of the mortification and humiliation I shall feel when this gets known, and all my friends will wonder, and surmise, and so stab me unthinkingly. But may I say something to you that's very personal ? though the page we've read together is turned down for ever."



He nods consent, still moodily sitting there in front of her, and now the girl grows very earnest.

"Philip, work for Olive, prove to everybody that you're as worthy of her at last, as you've been faithful in your heart all along. I shall feel so proud of you when you have won a place, and can claim Olive, and I can turn round on everybody and say this is the girl he loved from the first, and this is the woman he has married, and both he and she are very dear friends of mine."

For an answer to this Philip rises up, and says,—

"By Jove! there is no hope for me with you again; good-bye, Madge, whatever I do in the world, whether it's good or bad, I shall feel at least that you wished me to do what was well."

Then they shake hands; such a long,


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hearty hand-clasp it is. And, somehow, (so inconsistent are all human beings) this moment of parting is a bitter one to them both.

Other eyes than Madge's see him go away. Other eyes than Madge's notice the discomfiture which is painted on his face, which is legibly expressed in his gait and bearing. And one and all they misjudge Madge, and say,—

“ It has been too much for her. I knew she would not be patient any longer, now that he has killed her mare.”

Madge is still sitting in that chair fronting the sofa, when Mrs. Henderson comes in presently with some fluid specially suited to invalids, in a tea-cup. Rather to Mrs. Henderson's surprise (and this lady has had considerable experience) Madge is neither in tears, nor in a passion. She seems absorbed



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in thought, but rouses herself readily enough, and actually broaches the topic herself.

“Did you see Philip as he went out?”

“Yes, I did,” Mrs. Henderson says, “but not to speak to him ; Madge, my darling, what has happened ? is anything wrong ?”

“I think something will be right, at last, that has been wrong for a long time,” Madge says, with a certain enthusiasm ; “all that has actually happened is this, Philip and I are not going to be married.”

This announcement is a shock to Mrs. Henderson, although she has come in prepared to hear tidings of an abnormal nature. It is always rather shocking to hear for the first time of the dissolution of such a partnership as Philip and Madge had announced themselves as about to enter into. For a moment or two she cannot tell whether she is glad or sorry. It is so utterly unlike any-



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thing that she has hitherto believed Madge to be capable of—this disannulling of a bond—that she is more surprised than anything else.

Eventually she finds words to say,—


“Your doing or his, dear?”

“Neither of us,” Madge says, promptly, “it did itself; you will know all there is to know before very long; and now, dear, will you go and tell Aunt Lucy, and let us get home?”

Madge has grown pale through very earnestness while making this appeal, and so, in a half-sympathetic, half-perplexed spirit, Mrs. Henderson obeys her, and goes to Aunt Lucy.

“Don’t be agitated,” she begins, “but I must tell you that something very unforeseen has occurred between Madge and Philip.”

“Have they—they *haven’t* quarrelled?” Aunt Lucy gasps when Mrs Henderson has



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brought her halting statement to a conclusion.

“Dear ! dear ! that it should have come to this.” And Aunt Lucy proceeds to drop a few silent tears over something or other, she is not quite sure what.

“Has she broken it off with the young man because of the fatal accident to her Brunette?” Aunt Lucy asks with mysterious confidentialness presently. Philip has sunk into a mere “young man” again in her estimation now that he is no longer to be looked upon as linked to Madge.

“She says she didn’t break it off,” Mrs. Henderson says, dubiously ; “but”—

“But you don’t mean to say *he* has jilted *her* ?” Aunt Lucy cries out in that holy wrath which is apt to inflame the breast of women when any one dear to them is accused of being put in the position of the “left.” “Oh ! you don’t mean to say he has jilted


her?” she repeats, wailingly. And then she picks up heart of grace and adds, witheringly,—

“ Well, better so, than that she should have been linked for life to scum of the earth that goes about without proper introductions.”

Mrs. Henderson feels that this is a cut at her for having accepted Philip so readily. But she is not in a mood to resent such cuts now. Her own bitter consciousness of aptitude for being used as a tool, is upon her to the extent of exorcising every particle of pride. All she says in reply therefore is,—

“ Better so, better so : yes, a thousand times ; but, dear Miss Roden, there has been a contest, and we shall never know who gave the sharpest strokes ; only this—how shall I word it ? Madge is not wounded in the way you fear.”

Miss Roden questions and cross-questions,



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and Mrs. Henderson replies and explains as well as she is able to do. But they neither of them come to a clearer understanding of the case than this : namely, that the marriage between Philip Fletcher and Madge Roden is broken off. The girl who so quietly and interestedly superintends the packing operations presently, does not look like a jilted woman. And yet ! she has avowed that she did not “do it,” but that it “did itself,” which is the verbal refuge jilted women generally take.

There was a very good parting this same day between the strange mistress of the manor, and the girl who had been her guest. The old lady, too, had witnessed the manner of Philip’s exit from the place where he had been wont to come and play the part of “young lord-lover.” And something in it recalled to her mind an incident of the




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days when she, too, "was very young and fair."

"My dear," she whispers, giving Madge's hand a final farewell grip, "I had a trouble when I was young, and it went *here*" (and she touches her forehead lightly as she speaks). "Mr Graves wasn't the man I wished to marry when I cared for any of the good that a real marriage means. I made my mistake at the last, my dear,—you've got over yours at first ; *you'll* end your life with something better than a dumb animal to love."

And with this prophecy ringing in her ears Madge departs from the place to which she had come with Phil so many weeks ago—from the place in which Fate has commanded that the bond be broken which existed between Phil's cousin and herself.

There is supreme difficulty to the girl in taking up the links of the old life at home




again. The old life ! do I say ? She never can live that again. She has had her lover and her experiences, and her experiences remain with her though she has lost her lover. Remain with her, and disable her for the old life of childish pleasure in the scenes and the people she has known from her childhood ; disable her for the old-absorbing enjoyment in the quiet girlish pursuits—in the peaceful, uninteresting Halsworthy routine. So much has happened since that day when she rode away so blithely on Brunette with Phil by her side, that she can hardly believe that she is the same girl.

Nevertheless she makes an effort to be the same, or at anyrate to do the same things as of old. She resumes her part of young Lady Bountiful in the parish. She again organizes croquet parties, and Mrs Henderson is more to her than ever, and is more sought by her

than ever. But even to this dear friend Madge says very little about Philip, and nothing about the real cause of the rupture. She confesses to taking the keenest interest in him still, and when she does mention him, does so in a hearty, genial way that upsets the theory of her heart being hurt, or of hate having taken the part of love. She even avers one day that she "is longing to hear from Philip; that she thinks Philip unkind and thoughtless in not writing to her."

She says this in a passion of vexation to her aunt one morning when a budget of letters have been turned out from the post-bag, and her aunt is filled with bewilderment on the spot. Aunt Lucy has no precedents of her own to go upon, but she "knows what is right," under such painful circumstances."

"My dear," she says, kindly, "is it wise of you to permit yourself to hanker after any—



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even the most distant—intercourse with Mr. Philip Fletcher any longer?”

“I don’t know about its being wise,” Madge says, “but it’s natural surely; at anyrate I do long to hear from him: I’m always hoping and expecting that Philip will write and tell me that he has done something that will make us all very happy again.”

“You don’t mean to tell me,” Aunt Lucy says as fast as she can, but with her utterance considerably impeded by her indignation “you don’t mean to tell me that, after all, you would accept him again, Madge.”


There is supreme comfort and reassurance to the old lady in Madge’s stare of unfeigned surprise at such a supposition. There is almost joy to Aunt Lucy in the definite “No” which follows it. And yet with it all, there is a sort of vexation that Madge should puzzle her so completely.

“ If you can feel such surprise at the mere idea entering my mind,” she says, stiffly, “ you ought not to wish to hear from the poor young man ; intercourse which may be sport to you may be death to him.”

At this suggestion Madge smiles sadly. There is something touching to her in the idea of anyone supposing there can be “ death ” or even “ pain ” to Olive Aveland’s passionate lover, in intercourse with herself, Madge Roden. But a sense of respect for her aunt causes her to offer this meagre explanation.

“ You’ll understand why I’m longing to hear from him by-and-by, when he does what I hope and expect he will do ; and oh ! dear, I hope he won’t be long about it, for I do sadly want a change.”

“ What can she mean by it ? ” Miss Roden asks of Mrs Henderson, after giving that lady



the heads of this conversation. And Mrs Henderson has to confess herself as ignorant of her young friend's meaning, as is her interlocutor.

Madge has written a frank, loving letter to Olive, conjuring the latter to “come and stay at Moorbridge House as companion, friend, anything she likes. You may call yourself my governess, and teach poor ignorant me anyone of the dozens of things you know, you proud independent thing, only come ; I should be happier and so would you be, for we love each other, Olive. I am lonely very often. Philip Fletcher and I have broken off our engagement. He *never loved me one bit* ; but we shall always be friends, and when he is the husband of the girl he loves I shall be fonder of him than ever.” “There,” says sagacious Madge, as she indites this paragraph, “that will prepare her for the offer he'll make

her soon, and her mind will be easy about me ; she will feel that I know all about it, and am ready to say, ‘bless ye, my children,’ when they’re united.”

This letter brings possibilities that she had believed to be burnt out well before Olive again. It causes her heart to throb with a joyful hope to which that poor oft-tortured organ had been a stranger. It sends her down on her knees in a spasm of gratitude—in a feeble, hysterical burst of praise and thanksgiving, for that she has been mercifully preserved from marrying Griffiths Poynter in her despair. It sends her to Barr and Battle’s show-room in such a glow of renewed vigour, and beauty, and hope that she makes the room, which is dingy by reason of a thick fog which is reigning, almost glow. The air of rosy happiness which she diffuses illuminates the whole place, and places the mantles

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in such a burning light in the eyes of customers that she sells briskly this day, and does not loath her occupation. For Philip is free, and he loves her.

She is singing in her heart all day. "He will return, I know him well," is the burden of her song. Her own Philip, her always loved Philip. "He had been true to himself and to her, and had confessed to Madge, and Madge had released him, like an angel as she was." This is the view Olive chooses to take of the blissful change which has come about. She almost dances as she goes hither and thither during her work. She almost hears the words, the tones, in which he will plead to put an end, at once and for ever, to the separation which has lasted far too long already.

Perhaps there will be a letter awaiting her when she goes home this evening. Or



perhaps he will be there himself awaiting her, anxious to set her heart and his own at rest without delay. Madge does not say how long it is since they have arrived at the clear understanding that has brought such bliss to Olive.

Higher and higher her heart soars into the realms of hope, as the door is opened promptly in answer to her knock, and her sympathetic landlady tells her, with a face all aglow with satisfaction, that a gentleman is in the parlour, one you'll be glad to see, Miss." It does not occur to Olive that Philip is a stranger to the woman. "It must be he:" it never enters her head that it can be another. She bounds upstairs, flashing out thanks from her joyful eyes as she passes the landlady; she glances into the little parlour, and there, sitting dolefully by the low burning fire, she sees Griffiths Poynter.

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In the heat of her passionate disappointment she grows unjust and ungenerous. In the first pang of her pain she feels as if she must smite someone, and the first one who comes to her hand is the faithful, inoffensive fellow who would save her every pain, if he could, at any cost to himself.

“Oh! is it only you, what did you come for?” she says, and then her over-wrought spirit gives way, and she sits down and begins to cry, for she has not learnt the lesson yet, she has not learnt to distinguish the right man from the wrong; she can’t make up her mind to “ring out the false, and ring in the true.” And so she sits down and cries at Griffiths Poynter. “Just as though he was hateful to her,” he feels, and shows, by the angry reproachful fire in her eyes that finally burns away her tears, that she is not feigning.

“I have come to tell you something about an old friend of yours. I wouldn't have intruded upon you after—after what passed between us the last time we met if I hadn't thought my news would justify my intrusion.”

He pauses, and she looks up inquisitively. She feels a conviction that it is something about Philip, though Grif knows nothing of Philip in connection with herself. She won't question him in words, but her eyes are full of inquiry, and he answers them at once.

“The news is from my part of the country, Madge Roden has been very ill ! did you know it ! ”

“I heard from Madge this morning,” Olive answers ; “she tells me she has been ill ; but she didn't make much of it.”

“It's not her way to make much of anything unpleasant that happens to herself,”

Grif responds, loyally. "Did she tell you anything else?"

Olive knows well to what he refers now. But she does not dare to speak. The palpitation at her heart would cause her tones to tremble, and she shrinks from speaking of Philip in trembling tones to Griffiths Poynter. So she only turns a flushing face towards him, and he goes on gravely.

"Her engagement with that man—that Mr. Fletcher—is broken off: thank God."

"Thank Heaven," Olive echoes, fervently. She has no further consideration for Griffiths. He has dared to disparage the man she loves. A faint glimmering of the truth flashes across Griffiths's mind. Then he looks at the girl, who seems to him to be much too exalted and noble a creature to care for anyone so despicable as he firmly believes Philip to be. He scorns himself for having entertained the

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notion for an instant of Madge's recreant lover being dear to Olive Aveland. And so he executes another mistake.

“ You feel as I do, glad of anything, however painful at the time, which has brought this about ; marriage with a fellow without an atom of principle to a girl like Madge—”

“ How dare you come to me and say a word against Philip Fletcher,” she cries out, sharply ; “ how can you be so cruel and so coarse ? whatever your jealousy may prompt you to think, how dare you say it to *me* ? ”

“ Oh ! Olive ! ” he stammers out, overwhelmed with sorrow for the girl who is building upon such shifting sands, with sorrow for the girl, and pain for himself, that such a one as Philip should be preferred to him. “ Oh ! Olive ! is this the reason—”

“ Don't, don't, don't,” she whimpers out, ashamed and abashed now that she has

declared herself in this way ; " isn't it bad enough as it is without my having to talk about it, and explain ; *why* did you sting me into saying what I did ? " she asked, with a sudden stamp of her foot, like a petulant child, instead of the trouble-tamed woman she was ; " *why* did you come here and torment me into proclaiming myself a fool ? it wasn't kind, it wasn't honest, it wasn't manly—"

"Olive ! treat me as a brother, and try to believe that as a brother would save you if you had one, so I will now, if you'll let me ; yes, in any way, however it may hurt me."

He is desperately shocked at the open exhibition of her love for the man he believes to be a scoundrel, for he feels that she has been forced into making it by latent despair. But he forces himself to offer her his aid, and even if she bids him go and bring Philip

from the nethermost ends of the earth, he would do her bidding. It is a blow to her enthusiasm, therefore, and he experiences altogether something like the sensation a shower-bath might give him, when Olive (feeling ashamed of herself the whole time) flashes at him with the words,—

"Brotherly aid! what do you mean? Do you suppose I want you to go and hunt up Philip Fletcher, and ask him what his intentions are? I know them well enough, thank Heaven; I know that now he has got his order of release he will come back to me, and *how* happy I shall be at last."

For one moment there is about her an air of irrepressible triumph. The next her head droops low, and she murmurs,—

"Forgive me, Griffiths, and if you won't forget me altogether, forget me at any rate as I have been to-night."

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"I can do nothing for you?" he asks, hesitatingly, "you and Mr. Fletcher understand each other."

She raises her eyes to his face, and dashes all hope from his heart. "Yes, we understand each other," she says, and shivers a little as she commits herself to the statement, for her fainting soul tells her that she may have affirmed too much.

And he accepts the statement in its full force without the smallest reservation, and goes out presently, crushed and crestfallen, firmly believing that Olive will marry Philip Fletcher after a very brief delay, and that he will make her miserable. "At anyrate," Grif thinks, humbly and mournfully, "I have no further right to intrude myself into her life ; that is over."

There is no letter from Philip the following morning. But still Olive makes an effort to



be as she was yesterday, to be as light of heart and foot. But the effort is beyond her. Towards the end of the day the elasticity goes from both, and it is a very springless Olive who eventually obeys a call to wait a specially hard-to-please customer.

The new comer stands with her back to Olive as the latter comes up with a trimmed polonaise in hand. The lady is slender, graceful in figure, rather girlish and flighty in action, as she perpetually appeals to an old gentleman who stands by her side to endorse her opinion about different things. As Olive nears them they turn, and the old gentleman says, “ Bless my soul, my *dear* child ! ” and the lady’s blue eyes open wide, and Olive finds herself face to face with the Tollingtons.

With a sob and a gulp she lets her burden fall, and holds her hands out to her father’s

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old friend. And at that moment Mrs. Tollington frisks towards someone who is coming into the show-room, and says,—

“We won’t keep you another moment, Mr. Fletcher. I’ll choose my polonaise another day.”

So she meets Philip again, and there is more than the bitterness of death in meeting him thus in attendance on her fair foe and traducer.

## CHAPTER II.

### A VELVET PAW !

“OH don’t ask fifty questions of me all at once : my poor little head won’t stand it,” Mrs. Tollington pleads, shaking her fair hair, and fluttering in her uncertainty as to whether she shall assume the volatile, or the youthfully diffident and bewildered air. “How can I tell you ‘ what it all means ’ in a minute? Olive ! why don’t you try and explain to Admiral Tollington—if you can—how you come to be here ? ”

The delicate blonde woman is quite herself as she utters this last sentence. She ceases the assumption of either the volatile or the youthfully

diffident air. She is quite the spiteful elder woman, jealous of the way in which the younger fairer one has concentrated the interest of the two men upon herself in an instant.

"It would be difficult for me to explain why I'm here," Olive answers, bending her brows severely enough on her smiling foe. Then with a change of expression, as she resolves, "No, I won't tell him; fool as she is, she is his wife and he was my father's friend;" she says aloud,—

"I am happy enough here—try to believe that; I haven't patience enough to be a governess."

Admiral Tollington watches her keenly and shakes his head, "I don't understand it," he says with a sigh, and then Philip pushes nearer and says to Olive,—

"Won't you speak, to me, Miss Aveland? have I quite faded from your mind?"

He endeavours to say this in a semi-playful way, and Mrs. Tollington suspects him vaguely, and Olive despises him for it. How can he pretend to be any other than he is to her, whoever may be standing by? What are these Tollingtons to him that he should address her as “Miss Aveland,” and affect the airs of a mere everyday acquaintance. She looks him steadily in the face, and he flashes an imploring glance at her from between those lashes which so often curtain his real feelings, and she lets him take her hand.

“How should I forget you?” she asks, simply, and Mrs. Tollington gives a bitter little laugh,—

“You have yet to learn, Mr. Fletcher, that Miss Aveland takes everything seriously; she always thinks more is meant than is said.”

"My dear, where are you living?" Admiral Tollington asks. "I shall come and see you, and hear from you——"

"An elucidation of these mysteries," his wife interrupts. Then she passes out of the room with a bow, almost compelling her husband to go with her by placing her hand on his arm. And Olive stands back, proudly and angrily refusing to notice the hand which Admiral Tollington stretches out to her in passing.

In spite of the commanding, backward glance which Mrs. Tollington gives him, Philip lingers, to say,—

"Olive! say you're glad to see me."

"Why are you with that woman—that woman who was so cruel and insulting to *me*?" she says, chokingly.

"He's such a nice old fellow," Philip pleads, "such a thoroughly honest, good old fellow ;

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I'd drop her fast enough, but I like him too well."

Olive's head gives an impatient twitch.

" How long has he been home ? "


" A week or ten days," Philip says, getting red, " he will be a good friend to us both," he adds. And then he tells Olive she will hear from him soon, clasps her hand once more, and follows his friends !

How bitter the girl is all the rest of that day. How she loathes herself—how she despises that element of fidelity in her nature, which makes her cling to this debilitated hope that Philip will be true to her after all. But she can't help it. It is the strongest element in her nature ; it is the master-passion of her life ! If it were not, how happy and prosperous, and altogether successful she might be.

It is her destiny to lose the worthy, and

love the unworthy, and seek to blind herself, and fail in doing so. And in this failure is the sting, for if she believed in Philip as thoroughly as she loves him, she would be the happiest woman in the world this night, instead of one of the saddest.

It is altogether unimportant, of course it is altogether unimportant, yet Olive tortures herself with futile conjectures as to why he "was with the Tollingtons." In her helpless, blind jealousy against anyone who keeps him from her she is ready to accuse Admiral Tollington himself—her father's old friend—of being in league against her, of wishing to humiliate her, and generally to make her of no account. For he is "shorn of his strength by that nasty affected Dalilah," she thinks, angrily; and she hates Mrs. Tollington for her blonde locks, and fair complexion on which Time leaves no trace, and for her affected





youthfulness and for her apparent intimacy with Philip Fletcher. And in her solitude this night the memory of that meeting in the show-room rankles horribly, and she "has no friend to whom she can turn for solace and sympathy," she feels in cruel forgetfulness of Griffiths Poynter, who is quite ready to bear the brunt of all her bitterness provided she will rely on him as on a brother.

Meanwhile Philip is dining comfortably with the Tollingtons at the big luxurious West-end hotel, where they are staying until it is settled at which port Admiral Tollington's flag shall be hoisted. Dining with them comfortably, and speculating with considerable amusement as to the special form of absurdity which his hostess will bloom into when she is such an acknowledged power in a port as its Admiral's wife.

The gallant, good, kind old sailor has had

a hint from head-quarters as to where his flag is to be unfurled, and, as may be supposed, he has given his wife a hint in turn. Accordingly Mrs. Tollington speaks most unadvisedly about "When we go to Plymouth," and "When the Admiral and I give our first ball I shall insist on your being at it." Philip accepts her invitations, which partake of the nature of a royal mandate, and despises her a little for "giving them in that way to a fellow who doesn't care for her," and dislikes her more than a little for having wounded Olive, his Olive !

A dozen packages arrive from a dozen different shops, for Mrs. Tollington is quite determined to hoist her flag with much splendour and pomp. In imagination she sees and hears people "taking her for Admiral Tollington's daughter," and she frames many prettily worded sentences, by

means of which to undeceive them. "Youth and I parted when I married, and how anyone can take me for Admiral Tollington's daughter *now* I can't imagine," is one of her pet phrases. But all the while she says it she tries to look seventeen, and flatters herself that she succeeds in doing so.

The new and brilliant plumage in which she is going to preen herself for her flight into the new fields, claims her attention now, and so the two men are left to themselves. As her dress rustles richly out of sight, Admiral Tollington dashes right into the heart of the matter which is interesting them both.

"Why did Miss Aveland leave my wife?" he says, "I see you know!"

The impulse to tell the truth is upon Philip for an instant, but only for an instant. Then he checks it, as is his wont. He assoils his conscience for so doing by telling himself

that it is morally wrong to make ill-feeling between man and wife. Further, he tells himself that he does not know what really transpired when Olive left Mrs. Tollington's house in a rage. "Olive's temperament is always warm," he reminds himself, "and women always exaggerate matters of feeling. On the whole!"—Well, on the whole, he resolves to be strictly non-committed. It would be inexcusable on his part to make poor old Tollington uncomfortable, and Mrs. Tollington is really a very nice little woman." So he says,—

"Miss Aveland is a very reserved girl, I think, and I understood at the time from Mrs. Tollington that the want of confidence in her on Miss Aveland's part, distressed her; but I really know or remember very little about it."

"Do you think" (and now Admiral Tol-

lington fixes a keener gaze than he has fixed before on the open and ingenuous countenance of his wife's new friend, that "charming Mr. Fletcher who had saved her life,") "do you think that there is any love affair at the bottom of it? do you think any fellow has been playing fast and loose with Olive Aveland?"

He pushes the wine with some vehemence towards Philip as he asks this, and Philip nonchalantly fills his glass before he replies.

"I can't fancy any fellow being such a fool."

"Neither can I, sir, neither can I," the old sailor says, lashing himself into wrath at the bare supposition; "but something has gone wrong with Olive Aveland, and I'll find out what it is, and who it is, and the doer of it shall not go unpunished, tho' her father is dead."

Philip bows his head approvingly. The sentiment pleases him very well, for he likes to feel that Olive—Olive who loves him with such utter devotion—is properly appreciated by other people. He feels quite certain, too, that no unpleasant results to himself will attend Admiral Tollington's investigation. For Olive will be staunch, Olive will never betray him, or witness against him in any way. He feels almost complacent about his own conduct when he considers how it has won him the unswerving fidelity of such a one as Olive Aveland.

Wrapt in his own meditations concerning the change in the child of his old friend, Admiral Tollington becomes silent and self-absorbed. Therefore it is an agreeable change presently, to go into the drawing-room and have tea poured out for him by the fair hands of Mrs. Tollington, Philip feels.

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She tries to be winningly gushing to her husband, but his attention is given rather to the evening paper than to her. So presently she makes a sign to Philip, and he goes and takes a low chair by the side of her sofa.

“ I want to ask you something as a friend who has your interest very much at heart,” she begins in a very low tone, and Philip suppresses the laugh into which he is almost betrayed, and asks :

“ What is it ? ”

“ I could not bear to see you, the man who saved my life, fall a victim to any designing manceuvrer. Why did you stay behind when we came away from that shop to-day ? ”

“ I stayed to speak to Miss Aveland,” he says, boldly, for it rather pleases him to see Mrs. Tollington grow flushed, and vexed, and confused in her friendly eagerness to save

him from every other woman's toils. A few soft words will always bring Mrs. Tollington round again, and the speaking of soft words to women does not at all overtask Philip Fletcher.

"I thought so, I feared so; Oh! Mr. Fletcher I shall speak to you as a sister might; I can't bear to think of you as trifling with anyone, and still less can I bear to think that you have any serious intentions about Miss Aveland. I have an instinct against her—I've had it from the first," and Mrs. Tollington tries hard to make a shudder, convulses her frame slightly as she finishes her sentence.

"Let us talk of something pleasanter," the arch-hypocrite says; "let us talk of the laurels you will win, as the Naval Queen of whatever port you're going to."

"Which means," she says, sharply, "let us



leave Miss Aveland's name out of the conversation ; why are you so guarded about her ? why can't you bear to hear me speak the truth about her ? ”

Mrs. Tollington has unconsciously raised her voice while asking these questions, and to her annoyance, when she pauses for an answer, she sees her husband's eyes fixed upon her in undisguised amazement. Philip sees this too, but he is neither annoyed nor perplexed. This is not the kind of thing that upsets Philip's equanimity.

“Ladies' instincts always amuse me,” he says, slowly rising up and strolling over nearer to the lamp-lighted and journal-laden table ; “my cousins have them to a great extent, and the people they abuse most frightfully at first generally turn out to be their bosom friends after a time—”

“And deceive them in the end,” Mrs.

Tollington interrupts. But Philip won't pursue the conversation with her. He picks up the *Times*, which Admiral Tollington has just thrown down, and, with a careless "Any news to-night, sir?" begins to read it. Leaving Mrs. Tollington with a feeling of being foiled, and of having shown her cards too openly.

Philip, sauntering away composedly to a small Bohemian club soon after this, little suspects that he is being arraigned at the bar of the Admiral's honest opinion, tried, and found wanting. He has scarcely made his adieux to the Tollingtons and bowed himself out of the room before the Admiral opens his battery upon that fair fortress, his wife.

"There's something about this new friend of yours that I don't like, my dear, something I don't like at all."

•

“But I have no new friends,” the lady says, languidly leaning back, and putting her feet up on the sofa with an air that denotes extreme lassitude. Then she makes a bold stroke to disarm him.

“I was so glad to hear Mr. Fletcher say good-night ; he might have seen an hour ago how wearied I was ; but young men are so inconsiderate ; because it pleased him to stay and talk to you—”

“It seemed to me that it pleased him to stay and talk to *you*,” Admiral Tollington grunts. Not that he does himself or anybody else the injustice of disliking to see the wife he looks upon as young, and pretty, and attractive, the recipient of attentions from men who are like unto her in that they are young, and attractive too. But he has a well-grounded and justifiable horror of any attempt being made to hoodwink him. And

it certainly has appeared to him to-night that the low tones, and the lady's reproof to her guest savours of greater intimacy than he had been told existed between the pleasant-looking pair.

Mrs. Tollington pulls the filmy handkerchief with which she has been veiling her eyes from the light, off her face, and placidly regards her husband.

"My dear," she says, in gentle, deprecating remonstrance, "you forget! he is not a new friend: it is some months since he saved my life at the peril of his own: Oh! that terrible day; don't let me speak about it," and Mrs. Tollington heaves a thrilling, sighing sob, which she hopes will close the conversation.

"I can believe that the fellow is plucky enough," Admiral Tollington says, heartily. He would feel heartily grateful to any man, however much of a miscreant that man might

be, who had saved Mrs. Tollington's life. But, yes, he can't help feeling that there is a 'but' about this young man, and he can't resist the inclination to word his feeling.

“But he didn't speak out about Miss Aveland in a straight-forward way ; *I* overheard your conversation with him of course, my dear ; and, moreover, I had been questioning him concerning the cause of her cutting herself adrift from you in the way she did. I fancied he knew something about it, and now I'm sure.”

“Are you ? ” Mrs Tollington says, faintly, “why ?—how ? ”

“He knows all about it,” Admiral Tollington persists, clinging to the portion of the subject that is most interesting to himself, as it concerns Olive, and disregarding his wife's question. “He knows all about it, and he's too much of a sea-lawyer to answer me

plainly : so, my dear, I must come to you for all the information you can give me about that poor child, whose father was as good a seaman, and as gallant an officer as ever trod the quarter-deck. Many's the boat-action, and cutting-out-expedition that poor Aveland and I have been in together," Admiral Tollington continues, with a lapse into the tenderly reminiscent frame of mind that leaves him unprotected, and shows Mrs. Tollington where the weak places are in his armour.

"Do tell me about some of those exploits," she says, rousing herself up, and leaning on her elbow, and making her eyes sparkle with enthusiasm. "I have always been half crazy about naval adventures and anecdotes ; I used to worry papa dreadfully to get him to tell me about the storms and engagements he had been in. Do you know papa got

fifteen *awful* wounds in one action—a boat-action I think it was—thirteen on one leg, and four on his back and shoulders, and two *frightful* ones on his head——”

“That makes nineteen ! you said fifteen,” Admiral Tollington interrupts. He is interested in the story of the mutilated condition of Mrs. Tollington’s papa, but above all things he likes accuracy when dealing with facts !

“I made a mistake—it was nineteen,” Mrs. Tollington replies, promptly ; “how he lived through it was a marvel to everyone ; the doctors said his tenacity of life was surprising.”

“What was it in ?” Admiral Tollington asks, paying the fair biographer the compliment of taking off his glasses, and settling himself near the fire to listen comfortably.

“Oh ! a boat-action ! ”

“But where?”

“Somewhere off the North American station,” Mrs. Tollington answers, yawning. She has turned the edge of the sword—her Admiral has forgotten Philip and Olive, and so her naval enthusiasm is waning fast.

“Never mind, never mind,” Admiral Tollington says, complacently, nodding his head; “I’ll look it out in ‘James’s Naval History’ to-morrow; probably there is an honourable mention made of such an affair as that. I’ll make an extract of it for you, my dear.”

For a moment Mrs. Tollington permits herself to feel furious with her painstaking practical spouse. Why will he persist in tracing things to their sources. “It’s utterly impossible,” she feels, “to talk civilly and gracefully to a man who will have every lightly mentioned detail authenticated. But



having involved herself in a web, it behoves her to wriggle out of it, so she says,—

“I daresay I have made more of it than it actually was, blundered in some way or other. I was always so enthusiastic and imaginative that poor papa couldn’t recognise his own stories very often when I told them back to him again. So I won’t be disappointed, dear, if you don’t bring me a very gratifying extract from ‘James’s History’ after all ; but do tell me some of your own escapes and adventures. I want to know all that you’ve ever done : I’m not one of the fashionably cold indifferent wives, dear, who know little and care less about the means by which their husbands have won distinction ; tell me.”

So she purrs upon him, making him believe that she is hungering to hear how he has fought, won, and made a name she is proud of.

### CHAPTER III.

#### MISS WESTCOTT INTERVENES:

THE sun rises upon the first day of the "Winstaple week," and the Winstaple week is a period from which men date events in this border-land district. Two balls are given in it. The hunt ball, which is good, and the county ball, which is better, the privileged say, because it is so hedged in with patrician traditions and rules and regulations, that all respectable people who are not "county people" are miserable at it.

These balls belong rather to the order of old-world festivities. The potentates of the land drive in from long distances, and put up

for two or three days at one or other of the ancient inns of the place, where they are treated to rather more ceremonial, and regarded with rather more outward awe, than falls to the lot of crowned heads travelling through the busier haunts of men now-a-days.

The hunt ball is by far the gayer affair of the two, for it falls on the night of the day of the best meet of the season, and nearly the whole of the crowded field attend the ball at night. And they are all in most sportsman-like and justifiable high spirits, for the run has been a tremendous one, and one of the monarchs of Exmoor held out till he reached the very heart of Winstaple, where he died like a king facing his foes. The prettiest Miss Westcott has the honour of being mentioned as the only lady out who rode well up the whole day, and was in at the death after

all. Ardent admirers of the chase are very much at the feet of this young Diana to-night. They are in ecstasies about her pluck and her prowess. "It would have been nothing if it had been a quick thing," they say ; " but it had been anything but a ' quick thing,' and yet she and her horse came up fresh and full of anxiety at the finish. It is a full and sufficient proof that she knows what she is about in the saddle, and " doesn't go fooling about, and bucketting her horse to pieces for a show-off."

The fresh, fair, handsome, light-haired girl is the Queen of the Revels indisputably. In spite of the severe run through the biting air, she does not seem one whit fatigued, but is leaping through every round dance like a young leopardess. And her favourite and most frequent partner is Phil Fletcher—her cousin Ronald's tutor.

There is no guile about Miss Westcott, and unquestionably there is nothing secretive nor underhand. She tells Phil that she "likes dancing with him better than any of the rest" so openly and earnestly, that Sir Galahad himself could have done no other than Phil does—namely, ask her again and again. The goddess of the chase doesn't mind his absorbed silence in the least. How can he talk, poor fellow, when all his attention is given to the grand entrance door through which it is possible Madge Roden may enter at any moment.

His good-tempered young partner takes a hearty interest in life all round, and so, though she hasn't the slightest objection to Phil's silence, she wonders at the unwonted taciturnity, and can't help noticing the direction his eyes take perpetually. Presently she indicates a spot into which she desires to be

propelled, in order to recover the breath which has ebbed away to the strains of the *La belle Hénélé Waltz*. As Fate wills it, this spot is near the door.

Certainly a handsome, striking girl is Miss Westcott. Rather redundant, perhaps, but not too much so for a big ball-room. Her bright *crêpe* hair would look tangled and untidy, probably, if things about her were on a smaller scale. But as it is, fluffiness and puffiness predominate, and her hair only strikes one as being the most luxuriant in the room. Altogether, with her bright, laughing, up-turned face, her tall full figure, and that irrepressible air of hers, which is as natural to her as shining is to the sun, she is a very prominent figure in the ever-changing view of the ball-room. And the man who is most frequently by her side is handsome and distinguished.

“Are you looking for anyone, Phil?” she asks, presently, when her breath has come back sufficiently to enable her to articulate. “Are you anxious about Ronald? My sister is keeping him out of mischief.”

“I think when this waltz is over I’ll look him up though,” Phil answers; “a hunt dinner, and a hunt dance——”

“To say nothing of so many pretty faces, may prove too much for Master Ronald’s head, mayn’t they?” she interrupts, laughingly. “What would my august aunt say if Ronald fell in love with some pretty unknown here to-night? she’d expire if she thought my sister indulged his boyish propensity to flirt; but if he married beneath him!—oh! poor Phil, you’d have a time of it.”

Miss Westcott laughs out in genuine enjoyment of her own conceit as she says this, and in her exuberance of spirit places her hand

on Phil's shoulder, and gives the signal for one more round, and they go off together, a handsome, much-observed pair.

She calls him "Phil" in mere thoughtlessness, as girls do so many things which they had better leave undone; and though he has never wished her to do it, it cannot be said that he actually dislikes it, for it drops with most friendly, and "nothing more," naturalness from Miss Westcott's tongue. So they swing round together, her draperies swirling out in the unfluttering way that tells one that the "waltzers are waltzing in time," and with the same look of "zest" about her with which she had followed the hounds the whole day. And uninterested people look at them, and think "they're a fine looking pair," and that is all.

But one interested person, who has come into the room just before this pair started



from the doorway, just in time to hear that last sentence of the young lady's, "poor Phil! you'd have a time of it," stands still, heart-smitten at once, though she knows it not herself, by the words and the sight.

To other people, Phil and Miss Westcott are a pair of ordinary good-looking mortals, and that they should dance a great deal together, and that the girl should call him "Phil," are matters of very little moment to anybody. But to this new-comer they mean so much. Madge Roden feels instinctively that the large blonde with ruffled hair—who addresses him familiarly by his christian name—is the special Miss Westcott at whose feet Philip affirmed his cousin to be—the same whose clever riding to-day is the theme of the hour.

Miss Roden, senior, and the Hendersons are close by her, and Madge can't help won-

dering whether or not they heard the words that will go on ringing in her ears—whether or not they are noticing the air of intimacy which is the only thing she sees in this brilliantly-lighted room? Before she can solve these doubts, a variety of men are undulating before her, programmes and pencils in hand, and Madge has pledged herself for all the best dances before she realizes that by so doing she has cut herself off from all chances of having a few quiet words with Phil.

The waltz ends, and the waltzers either patrol solemnly well in view of their seniors, or vanish into some kindly obscurity, where every whispered word is not noticed and commented upon by the many who have *had* their day, and are grievously pained to see others having it. We who are in the sear, we who are waning, can well understand the feeling, and ought to be lenient to it. All

the glory of a “ball” is over for a woman when men no longer jostle one another in their haste to secure her for so many dances. There comes, indeed, later on, a time of fuller and more perfect triumph than we could ever have known in our self-absorbed youth, and that is when our daughters take the field!

Madge is sitting down; her dress—a French combination of blue velvet and blue tulle (composed in such a way that beholders wonder that they haven’t always thought “velvet proper ball-room wear for a girl”)—half concealed by the ampler trains and laces of her aunt and Mrs. Henderson, who are on either side of her. Her face wholly concealed by the rather massive figure of the member for the division of the county, who is to be her partner in the ensuing gallop. But though she cannot be seen, she can see—and hear!

Distinct from the tramp of the multitude she hears one voice, and she loses the whole gist of an intelligent remark that the afore-said member is making to her, in her anxiety to hear what that voice says.

"I shall try to get Ronald away when I've found your mamma for you ; the long run and this hot room have been too much for the boy's head."

"Nonsense !" the Diana of the day responds promptly ; "the boy's head isn't worth thinking about if it can't stand a long run and a hot room : look at me."

Phil laughs, and utters some meaningless, semi-gallant words, that are accepted by the girl herself, and by uninterested listeners around her, as Society's small verbal change. But they are not so accepted by Madge. Phil has found his fate in this big, rather boisterous blonde ! She is sure of it ; and

so she makes a struggle to magnanimously consider Miss Westcott “a very fine, handsome girl.”

Simultaneously, she perceives that Mrs. Henderson and Phil have recognised one another, and that Phil is advancing to speak to that lady. The next moment Madge is shaking hands with him herself, and the next she is whisked off by her partner, for the gallop has begun, and then, as Miss Westcott is claimed and carried off, Phil forgets his anxiety about his pupil, and places himself between Aunt Lucy and Mrs. Henderson.

The memories of her parting scene, and her parting injunctions to the young fellow, are very present with Mrs. Henderson as he sits down, and asks her eagerly for “news.” She knows what he wants to hear. She knows that the rumour of the breaking

off of Madge's engagement has gone abroad, and that he is asking to have it verified. But she has scorched her fingers once, and she will be very chary how she fans love-flames for the future.

But she answers him very gently,

"News! my dear boy, if I gave you my news what a bore you would think me; it would be all about the village joys, and woes, and clubs. Tell me news, rather; tell me about your mother and sisters."

"They are quite well," he answers, coolly, for he considers that she is repelling him unjustly. So he turns to Aunt Lucy.

"How well Miss Roden is looking," he says.

"Yes," Aunt Lucy answers hurriedly, thinking of the fever this young man's imprudence brought upon her beloved niece, and wishing, with all her heart, that there

were no young men in the world to upset existing and agreeable arrangements. "Yes, poor dear child ; she was sadly shattered by that *terrible* affair, and it will leave its traces on her for life, I fear," and Aunt Lucy gathers her garments more closely about her, and fans herself vigorously, as though she would put the remains of the fever to flight by that means. And Phil feels strangely downcast, for he thinks that the "terrible affair" to which Aunt Lucy alludes with such ireful impatience is the breaking off of the engagement with his cousin.

"But it's past and over now," Mrs. Henderson puts in kindly, for she too is thinking of Madge's illness," and we'll agree never to speak of it again. Who is that fine-looking girl you were dancing with when we came in, Phil ? "

"Miss Westcott, the cousin of my pupil."

“Oh!” Mrs. Henderson says her “Oh!” so significantly that Philip blushes with annoyance, as he feels that Mrs. Henderson is thinking what is not the case. Before he can master this annoyance, and say something coolly critical about Miss Westcott that shall undeceive his hearers, the gallop comes to a clattering end, and Madge is restored to her place.

Now is his time, and he seizes it. He pleads with an eagerness he can't subdue for the next dance—for any—for *one* at least. And Madge has to shake her head, and declare herself “engaged for all.”

He looks round hopelessly, wondering whether any one of the men who have so unwarrantably stolen a march on him, will have the decent feeling to renounce her to him. And Madge meanwhile looks down and plays with her programme as it dangles



from her fan ; and wonders whether or not Phil will “arrange it” with some one to whom a dance with her will be but as water unto wine, compared to what it will be to Phil.

But he does not read the truth in her face, and so the opportunity slips, as does many a prized one from us all in life, and Madge gets into a vortex of other men, and for all the good Phil gains from her society, he might have stayed away from the hunt ball this night.

But there comes a moment when an unwary man leaves her on a fruitless errand after her cloak, in which she wants to wrap herself, as she proceeds down to supper. And in that moment Phil is by her side.

“I want to hear you say, that you forgive me *everything* that happened the last time I saw you,” he says eagerly, “and I want

you to tell me if the friendship I so proudly thought I had gained then is to be withdrawn from me altogether now."

"I have nothing to forgive—if I had I'd do it, and as for the rest everything is altered you know, and so perhaps we had better not try to go on building up, when the very foundation of what we built upon is broken down."

She hardly knows why she says this. She is only certain that she wishes him to know that Philip and herself have severed their bonds, and that she will not hastily form another bond even of friendship. So she dispirits and unwittingly deceives him.

Still he follows her down, and gets close to her at supper, and is preparing to try to touch once more the old spring of interest in himself, to wake the chords that have made the only music of his life, when Miss

Westcott and a boy partner who bores her take up a position next to him.

Miss Westcott is really “fond of Phil Fletcher.” She would use these very words in speaking of him to anyone, use them openly, and believe in very truth that they exactly expressed her unsentimental regard for him. We know so little of ourselves, even the most self-analytically disposed of us.

She is frank to a fault, this boisterous young being with the blonde hair, and so now directly she finds herself next to Phil who never bores her, she audibly expresses her delight, for she will be able to get away from the boy who does. And Madge listens to the effusive words that bespeak such well-grounded intimacy, and that so fatally confirm the statement Philip had made about his cousin being awfully gone on one of these girls. Listens, and lets the scorn in her heart

for the facility with which people love and unlove, and for the fickleness of herself and others, display itself in her averted face, and her cool manner.

“I knew you wouldn’t go, Phil,” Miss Westcott begins, “I felt sure of you for the after supper round dances ; they’re always the best, and we always belong to each other for them, don’t we ? ”

Madge tingles. She does not know that this remark is made by Miss Westcott for the purpose of ridding herself for the rest of the night of her youthful attaché, in whose mind calf-love had just developed the knowledge that he is as his sisters have often told him, “but an awkward hobble-de-hoy.” Poor fellow ! He too has his strictly private miseries, even as he stands here smiling the uneasy loose kind of smile, that will not limit itself, of indecision and awkwardness. He has

suddenly become conscious of so many things of which he had been happily oblivious. He knows that he has nothing to say for himself, nothing, that is, that a girl can care to hear ; he knows that the line of scarlet flesh between his cuff and his glove, which won't keep buttoned, is a hideous thing in woman's eyes. He knows that when he flops about in a gallop, or conducts himself like a surging wave in a waltz, that his partner must think him a mere bungling boy. He could almost have cried just now when he found himself panting, and heard himself puffing, after two sharp rounds, at the end of which Diana's breathing powers were in as perfect order as when they started. He is nineteen, and Ronald Westcott is only nineteen, but Miss Westcott's young adorer knows well that neither she nor any other woman would venture to treat Ronald with the mixture of

familiarity and unconcern with which they treat himself. He can't understand it, and he is miserable, even as he stands bearing the burden of Miss Westcott's fan and bouquet (he has sent her the bouquet himself), and handkerchief, and wine glass while that young being calmly disposes of her mayonaise and gives all her attention to Phil Fletcher.

Presently Madge feels that Miss Westcott is whispering to Phil. She cannot hear a word, she would not hear a word if she could. But she is annoyed at the mere fact, and it must be conceded that she is unwarrantably annoyed, for has she not done her best to chill him off to-night?

"Who's the pretty girl in blue?" Miss Westcott asks—"bewitching dress too, how well it would suit me!" Not the least of the young Diana's charms is her open and

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undisguised pleasure in her own appearance. You cannot call it vanity.

“It is Miss Roden,” Phil mutters, fervently hoping that Madge will not hear him.

“Oh ! the one who was engaged to your cousin ; a shame to have broken with such a nice fellow,” and now she addresses the youthful victim of her bow and spear aloud, “Mr. Mervyn, may I ask you to go and see where mamma is ? I won’t wander about in search of her till I know exactly where she is.”

He feebly shakes his chains. “Shall I find you here again if I do go ?”

“Well yes, you’ll find me if my partner has not claimed me,” she says blithely, and as he goes on her mission she turns to Phil, and laughs out unguardedly.

“Under the circumstances, I don’t suppose it will be very shocking, if I ask you to take

a turn or two with me, Phil. I can't stand that boy any longer." And she rises as she says it, and Phil is obliged to go off with her, without another word from Madge, without even a look.

The circumstances to which Miss Westcott has so carelessly referred, are simply these : that he has been living in her father's house for many weeks, that they are as intimate as brother and sister, and that they dance together nearly every night. But Madge feels *sure* that by "under the circumstances" "that overpowering girl" means their engagement. And the glory of the ball is gone.

She goes rather languidly through the rest of her engagements, but still she finds greater pleasure—no ! not pleasure, but greater peace in dancing than in sitting down, for she is shrinkingly afraid of the remarks that may



fall from Aunt Lucy and Mrs. Henderson. Everything connected with the one subject has stood out in such vivid colours before Madge this night, that she thinks the others must have seen it also. Naturally she has no admiration left for Miss Westcott. But she could ill bear to hear Phil's choice criticised by those two friends of hers.

At length she makes the very young lady-like plea to her partner, of requiring change of air, and indicates a wish to go out into one of the bench-lined corridors, and sit down out of the whirl. She feels that she may do this with impunity, for her partner is that same Mr. Mervyn who is wearing his heart upon his sleeve for Miss Westcott. Madge knows well that there will be no trouble with him. She has not “ridden to hounds all day, and come as fresh as paint to the ball to-night,” as he enthusiastically describes Miss

Westcott having done. And she is right. All his soul is with the young Diana of the day, though his body reposes upon the hard bench at Madge's side.

Presently she begs him "not to stay with her, but to get another partner and finish it." And this she does really in mercy to the boy, who keeps on craning his neck to look through the doorway, at the gyrating form of his love's young dream. He obeys her with an obedient haste that he is heartily ashamed of, but that he is quite powerless to repress. The fact is he has stimulated himself to the point of determining to "put it to the test" this night. His hand, heart, and possessions will be offered to Miss Westcott before the "lights are dead, the garlands shed," in the waxing light of day.

Wearily Madge sits there alone, her eyes fixed on the changing figures, but not seeing

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one of them. Suddenly the seat by her side is taken, and Phil Fletcher asks :

“I have watched for this moment to find you disengaged ; do give me a turn.”

“I have dismissed my partner on the plea of being too tired to dance any more,” she says evasively, and Phil lowers his head and pleads,—

“Not with me, as a proof to me that you haven’t altogether ceased to take a little friendly interest in me ? ”

“Friendly interest ! Under the circumstances even that is impossible.”

For an instant he harbours the *délusion* that the girl loved Philip too well to endure any communication with Philip’s relations now. Then he banishes it, and is about to say something, which shall prove to her at least that his interest in her is deeper than ever, when again Miss Westcott intervenes.

This time she comes flying up with real dismay on her face, and does not even see Madge. "Dear Phil," she begins, "do come; Ronald has taken too much wine, I'm afraid, and he's broken a big looking-glass; Papa can't manage him."

It was true. Ronald and a big cavalry sword, with which he had been practising a little harmless fencing, were the innocent means of deepening Madge's conviction of Phil being Miss Westcott's "dear Phil" in very truth. "I will be back directly," are his parting words as he goes off in search of his charge, and even at the door] he turns round and gives her a look that plainly entreats her to "wait for him."

## CHAPTER IV.

“HOPE TELLS A FLATTERING TALE.”

FOR three woefully expectant days, Olive Aveland has endured the suspense—now she simply lives through it. All of us know the difference that exists between these two passive forms of misery, or, if we have not learnt it already, we shall learn it by-and-by. But I believe that the last-named stage is, in reality, the stagnant period that must intervene before the death of any great suffering.

The fourth day dawns, and, as Olive wearily raises herself and prepares for the day, the wicked prayer is on her lips that she

“may not live to see another.” In that same moment she is helped and forgiven ; for the prayer that she utters, which really comes from her heart, is that “she may live to know how wise it all is.”

“Oh, happiness ! our being’s end and aim.” What servile misery we all go through in seeking to make you our own familiar friend. And you shun us the more determinately, the more we pursue you, and force upon us the conviction that you are very much like the denizens of this wicked world, after all,—never accessible to those who really need you.

No letter from Philip rests on her breakfast table, throwing a halo over it. Her rather dry bread and butter nearly chokes her as she tries to begin that “crushing out” system which she has half vowed to carry through. He is free, and he does not use his

freedom to come near her. "If he does not seek me, I *will not* let my life be laid waste by thoughts of him any longer," she says in her heart, with fierce determination.

Weak, weak "as the first that fell of womankind," as she is, she does really make strong and earnest efforts, all this day, to forget that this man lives, corroding her life! She endeavours, with all her power of argument, to prove to herself that he is a common-place character enough, selfish, and not too largely endowed with principle. She accepts the truth of the statements she makes to herself concerning him, and loves him just as well as if she disbelieved them all.

Olive, in short, belongs to that order of women—and it is not a small one, unfortunately,—who do not fall in love with the good qualities of men. Women of this type detect the "one virtue" (overlaid as it may

be by a thousand crimes), and justify their affection by it. Or they fail in detecting any virtue at all, and still love the poor sinner out of very pity.

As she goes into her lodgings this night, she tells herself that henceforth Philip's reign over her heart shall be a secret and unacknowledged one. He shall never have the satisfaction of feeling that he may leave her for any length of time, and always be sure of a welcome when it pleases him to come. "Good-by, my dear dead hope," she says ; "I've not even *you* left to me in the world now." And, as she so resigns herself, he comes across the room to her.

These three days, that have been so desperately long, and full of painful uncertainty to Olive, have been days of temptation and struggle to Philip. He knows what Olive does not realize, that it would be a



greater cruelty, on his part, to marry her, than to part with her at once and for ever. He knows that poverty with a wife and children, however much he loved them, would brutalize him. And he knows that, being what he is, he has no reasonable hope of ever emerging out of poverty by his own exertions. Further, he knows that, in the presence of the girl, all this knowledge is likely to prove vain.

So, for three days, he has been struggling against his inclination to be soothed by a sight of the one being in the world to whom he is the first and the dearest. But a sight of her woe-lined face, as she went to work this morning (he has waited for an hour each day to see her come out), has toppled down his resolution. And so behold him here at the eleventh hour!

Here as her friend only, not as her lover.

He has sworn solemnly to himself that nothing shall tempt him to the injustice of being more than calmly friendly with Olive Aveland. He has some vain and feeble notion "that, in turn, her own good sense will tell her that it is folly for them never to see one another, and to be apparently at feud, though marriage is out of the question." He never pauses to consider, as he himself will not be injured by the arrangement, that it is one to ruin Olive in people's estimation. There will be comfort to him in her society. What does it matter to Philip at what cost to the girl this comfort is purchased ?

"I should have called on you before," he glibly and falsely explains, as soon as they have shaken hands coldly ; "but I've been looking about to find employment." Then, as Olive vouchsafes no answer, does not even look at him, he goes on : "My prospects have

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altered very much since I saw you last ; do you know in what way ? ”

She turns her face towards him now, and it is steady as a rock as she says,—

“ I have heard from Madge Roden.”

“ Then you know that my engagement with her is broken off ? ”

“ Yes,” Olive says.    “ Why ? ”

She is hungering for him to say, “ Because I love you, Olive.” But he is a wise young man. Such a speech would mean a wedding-ring very soon ; and, very soon after that, all the subterfuges, and woes, and petty miseries of a ten-pound householder. So he sagaciously does violence to his inclinations, which would lead him to make the very speech Olive is vainly imagining, and answers instead,—

“ Miss Roden grew tired of me, I suppose.”

The bitterness which he infuses into these words—for it is his present design to play the part of a jilted and consequently embittered lover—almost convinces Olive that they are true. She makes a great effort to be decently sorry for him outwardly.

"I can hardly think that of Madge," she says, slowly ; "she is such a faithful-hearted girl."

"It's mortifying to have to acknowledge it," Philip says, with a short, harsh laugh ; "but I am obliged to believe that her heart had nothing to do with it from the first ; it was habit and her friend Mrs. Henderson. It's a blow to a fellow," he goes on appealingly to Olive, "after it has gone on for so long."

She presses a ring cruelly into her finger to keep herself from crying out in her pain. It is intolerable that he should come to her

and regret and lament another woman, even though that other woman is Madge. But there is nothing abject or reproachful in the way she says, presently,—

"It is human, I suppose, to value a thing more highly when we have lost it ; there was a time when you certainly did not duly prize Madge Roden or her love."

"Don't you reproach me for that, Olive," he cries, quickly. Then he feels that these words may be taken as the advanced guard of a whole regiment of "follies," if he does not neutralize their impression, and adds,—

"To be perfectly candid with you" (how natural it is to distrust the veracity of words that are prefaced in this way), "I did not value what I have lost highly enough until I lost it ; but I'm making up for that careless appreciation now. You mustn't be hard on me, Olive ; I have a horrible feeling of

isolation upon me ; my own people have cooled considerably towards me of late, and, if they hadn't, I am not sufficiently pleased with my cousin Phil's conduct to risk meeting him. If it were not for the Tollingtons and—you,” he says, hesitatingly, “I should be as solitary a fellow as there is in London.”

Again there is silence on Olive's part. She is most profoundly perplexed by Philip's manner and his words. But, in the midst of her cruel perplexity, she stands fast to her determination to make no sign that shall show him she is still his to torture as he likes. That he will torture her horribly, she knows ; but he shall not know it.

“Admiral Tollington is coming to see you,” he presently jerks out ; “how fond he seems of you, Olive.”

A softer look—one of gratitude—gleams in Olive's eyes,—poor, tear-stiffened eyes that

have been, for many a long day, set in circles of pain—and she says warmly,—

“I’m glad he is coming; I hope he won’t bring that woman with him.”

“Do you mean Mrs. Tollington?”

“Of course I mean Mrs. Tollington; Philip, I hate her!”

“She’s a good little creature enough, too,” he says, deprecatingly. “Frivolous and a little vain, perhaps, but not a person to call such a passion as hate into existence, any more than she is one to call such a passion as love into existence.”

He throws this last sentence as a sop to the Cerberus of Olive’s animus. Instead of being appeased by it, however, Olive is aggravated into saying,—

“Love! don’t speak of anything so holy as ‘love,’ in connection with such a creature as that,” and she lets go her lax hold of

the slender rope of dignity in a moment. Then she checks herself, and adds, more moderately,—

“I’m neither generous nor just, I know it very well, when that woman is my topic, Philip. She did not wrong and misjudge me through obtuseness and stupidity, she did it with low cunning and carefully regulated spite; but you’re right, she is not a person to call such a passion as hate into existence. For the future, I’ll only despise her—as I don’t despise anything else on earth,” she winds up, vehemently.

“She’s not worth talking about,” Philip is beginning, but Olive interrupts him by saying calmly,—


“Don’t shelve the subject in that way; I should like it better if you said, ‘Mrs. Tollington is a friend of mine, and I won’t stay here and hear her abused.’”



"And you would take advantage of that rash threat, and would go on abusing her in order to rid yourself of my society?" he questions, laughingly. "Oh yes! I know what women are."

"*You* know what women are!" she repeats, with infinite scorn—infinite, assumed scorn, that is, for her heart is melting to his looks and tones with ignominious speed. "*You* know what women are! do you really think you do? Why, you know nothing about them; you only understand shallow, puerile natures like Mrs. Tollington's."

She is so ashamed of herself for having fallen back upon this unworthy subject of dispute, that she hastens to create a diversion directly the words are out of her lips, by making tea and offering Philip some. But Philip is not like Griffiths Poynter, who would have swallowed boiling water if offered to



him by her fair hand. Philip detests tea at the hour when civilized man should be dining. He reminds himself that the Tollingtons—that “hospitable little woman, who has given him a general invitation, and her husband”—will be sitting down to a dinner that would be more appetising to the lady certainly if partaken of in company with someone besides her legal lord. And he has risen and said “Good evening” to Olive before he remembers that he dares not present himself, an unbidden guest, to the Tollingtons, in morning dress. Still he goes, for there is nothing in Olive’s manner to detain him.

He has not transgressed the prudent bounds of friendship. He has been undemonstrative, self-possessed, and perfectly kind in his manner towards her. On no pretext whatever can she, without open confession of disappointment, and consequent

loss of dignity, forbid his again seeking her in this quiet, merely friendly way ! She knows this well as he bids her good-by, and promises “another call soon.” She knows this well, and writhes under the knowledge.

She sits for hours over her untasted tea, trying to take in the facts and to face them. It has come to this, she realises. Philip takes a cool, mental pleasure in her society, and means to have it on serenely friendly terms. She is to be the sympathetic and intelligent repository of all his hopes, and fears and struggles, and schemes. And she is obliged to accept the situation.

By-and-by, after she has looked at the subject from every side, a faint colour flushes her face, corresponding to a faint flicker of hope in her heart. While he sees her often he will not care for any other woman ! There is comfort in that thought, the only comfort

left to her. And so she resigns herself to walking on the dubious neutral ground over which Philip has indicated that he intends leading her.

Days pass and lengthen into weeks, and Philip continues calling on her fitfully, and making himself and his poor prospects his chief topics. So far these visits resemble the first one, each detail of which has been described. But they differ in some respects. A change is creeping over Philip insensibly, for he does desire, above all things, to be prudent. But he finds it a more difficult task than he had at first imagined it to be, to be much with Olive without showing her that he loves her still.

The girl has schooled herself sharply, and never, by conscious look or word, does she attempt to break down the barrier he has created. But her heart swells with a

stronger hope after each visit, as the possibility, which has been her blessing and her bane for so many years, presents itself more and more definitely. She knows what Philip will not acknowledge to himself, that the firm ground he determined to stand upon is slipping from under his feet, that her presence is a trying temptation to him to relinquish the resolve he has made, and that, though he will not permit himself to utter a single soft word, every glance that he gives her is a message straight from his heart to hers.

His hand lingers longer and longer in giving the greeting and parting clasp. He defers to her opinion as to the way in which he shall go to work in trying to procure remunerative employment. And finally, he rushes to tell her of his first success with a return of all his old affectionate ardour,

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when he has secured the post of private secretary and amanuensis to Admiral Tollington.

The news cuts like a knife. All this time the Tollingtons have never been mentioned. Mutely they had agreed it seemed, after that one outbreak on Olive's part against Mrs. Tollington, to say nothing more about either the husband or wife. Secretly, Olive thought a great deal about her father's old friend, the frank, cordial, apparently kind-hearted man who had promised to come and see her, and had failed to keep his promise.

“We go down to Government House at ——— to-morrow,” Philip goes on explaining ; “it's a good thing for a fellow with absolutely nothing of his own to start with, and with old Tollington's interest will lead to something better.”

“What has kept—*who* has kept Admiral

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Tollington from coming to see me ? ” Olive asks, bluntly.

“ Oh, I forgot to tell you ! he has been out of town, up in Scotland, for some time. An uncle of his died lately and left him a large property, a place called Auchtarroch, up in the Highlands—they only came back yesterday.”

“ Has she been with him ? ”

“ To be sure she has,” Philip laughs ; “ you don’t suppose that our essentially feminine friend would miss the earliest opportunity of displaying herself as the chieftainess ; she’s absolutely magnificent now ; began calling her husband ‘ Auchtarroch,’ can’t you fancy her ? ”

“ I can fancy her making a fool of herself in any and every way,” Olive says, calmly.

“ She’ll disappear from mortal sight in a blaze of glory soon,” Philip says, with a burst

of laughter at the expense of the fair being who has won him the appointment. “Old Tollington is to be knighted for the promptitude with which he resented something or other that was supposed to be an insult to the British flag. Olive, you must let me write to you constantly, if it’s only to tell you how Lady Tollington handles her sceptre, and wears her crown.”

“You may write to me as often as you will, Philip,” Olive says, with her eyes glistening, “but if you ever mention that woman, I’ll burn your letter without reading it.”

“I won’t, then,” he promises, cheerfully ; “and you’ll answer my letters ? ”

She is heartily ashamed of herself as she nods assent, and whispers, “Yes.”

If any one despises Olive for these concessions which she makes, and considers her pusillanimous for her “Philip at any price ”



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conduct, let that person remember that the quality which is most highly prized in a woman is “fidelity,” and this fidelity was the strongest element in Olive’s nature.

He takes leave of Olive this evening with more tenderness than he has allowed himself to exhibit before. Suddenly, when he reaches the door, he turns back, seizes her hand and kisses it desperately. “We go down by an early train to-morrow morning,” he explains. “I shall not see you for six weeks, Olive.”

“The time will be longer to me than to you,” she murmurs. But she feels sure now, he is, he will be her own Philip at last.

After all, there is a delay of a week or ten days in the Tollington departure. The admiral receives the honour of knighthood, and remains to attend a levée before going down to his port. And Lady Tollington gets herself presented, and from the moment she

passes out from the presence of royalty, feels a withering contempt for everyone who “hasn’t a title, and doesn’t visit at court.” Never did the prefix of “Lady” give such entire happiness to a human being before. For a moment her heart is as light as her head; it would not astonish her at all, nor would it, indeed, seem other than a perfectly natural proceeding, if, as she descends from her carriage in all the glory of her court train, Philip Fletcher were to fling his cloak on the pavement for her to trample on.

Happily for himself Philip has a fair sense of humour, and Lady Tollington is a perpetual source of purest joy to him for many a long day.

## CHAPTER V.

### MISS WESTCOTT "THINKS."

PHIL's whisper to Madge is perfectly audible to her. Unluckily—as she feels—it is perfectly audible to Miss Westcott also. Phil, making off to discharge a duty that his conscience tells him has been too long neglected, leaves the two girls almost alone together, for the few saunterers in the corridors are strangers to them both. For a moment Madge thinks that she will get up and walk away without a word, but she remembers in time that such a proceeding will have the air of fleeing before the face of an enemy. So she remains quiescent, and can

think of nothing easy to say that may break the spell of silence naturally.

Miss Westcott presently saves her further trouble on that score. Miss Westcott, in a perfectly unembarrassed way, has been standing by the side of the young heiress "who has jilted that handsome fellow, Phil's cousin," looking down with good-natured, lively interest on the graceful head and pretty face that are so steadily averted from her. As soon as she has made herself thoroughly acquainted with the details of Madge's dress, and the way in which Madge's hair is arranged, she says,—

"How *silly* boys are to take too much champagne, are they not? Here my cousin Ronald has spoilt the evening for Phil by his stupidity; isn't it silly of him?"

"Rather more than silly, I think," Madge says, stiffly. She is rather offended, to tell

the truth, by this familiar address. “Why should she force me into conversation because she’s engaged to Phil?” Madge asks herself, leaping to an erroneous conclusion after the manner of women; “perhaps he has desired her to cultivate me. Oh!” there is much wrath in the way she says “oh!” half-aloud, and the tone catches Miss Westcott’s ear.

Miss Westcott is one of those happy-hearted creatures who are troubled with very few scruples about anything on earth, and who have no scruples at all about obeying their friendly instincts. So now, when Madge seems impatient and vexed, her companion says, amiably,—

“Shall I go into the room with you, and look for your friends; I’m due to some one for the next dance, and it won’t be nice for you to wait here alone. Phil will be sure to find you in the room.”

"I had no intention of waiting here for Mr. Fletcher," Madge says, rising up, and knowing that the unwonted colour in her face is painting her story vividly.

"Oh ! but he asked you !" Miss Westcott says, in some surprise, as if it were altogether beyond her conception that anyone could disregard a request of Phil's. "How infatuated she must be to think that everyone worships him, because she does," Madge says to herself. And then she tries to gentle her thoughts, and can only succeed in thinking that "the girl Phil has chosen, ought to be more dignified and reserved."

Poor Madge ! she does not understand her own feelings, and she does not dare to analyse them. Jealousy is blinding her eyes, or she would see that there is no tender interest in Phil, in the manner or tone of the elastic-footed young lady, stepping along so gaily by

her side. As it is, it is a positive relief to Madge when a mighty hunter swoops down upon the young Diana, and the pair go off just as she reaches Mrs. Henderson and Aunt Lucy.

“You haven’t been dancing lately,” Aunt Lucy says ; “Madge, I *know* you want to get home—shall we go at once ?”

Poor Madge professes herself “ready to go,” with a faltering tongue. It is hard to be taken away before Phil can come and speak to her once more, for the last time perhaps: it is very, very hard; a minute before and she had been indignant at it being supposed possible that she would “wait for Phil,” now it seems to her that it will be ill-bred, unfriendly, heartless, and insulting on her part to go, after having consented by her silence to stay. What has he done that she should treat him with scantier courtesy than

she would show to any other former friend, even if he is going to commit the enormity of marrying Miss Westcott.

As she stands, putting it to herself thus, Mrs. Henderson watches and reads something of the real state of the case.

"I don't think Madge ought to be one of the first to go," she says; "let it be felt that she takes a hearty interest in the hunt ball." And so it is settled, and Aunt Lucy yawningly resigns herself to wait another hour, in order that her niece may portray a proper interest in the festival held in honour of the grandest sport of her native county.

After some time, during which Madge has felt that she is lowering her flag considerably, and that many of those about her must know why she so pertinaciously refuses to dance, though she stays on, Phil comes up breathless from the exertions he has used in subdu-



ing his pupil's riotous spirits. His face lights up as he notices the irrepressible “welcome” that beams from her eyes at sight of him, and the way in which he offers her his arm, and she instantly takes it, suggests to lookers-on a previous understanding.

“You *did* wait,” he says, gratefully, as he hurries her on to a clearer corner ; “how good of you !”

“It was the commonest civility, as you asked me to do it,” she answers ; and then she nerves herself to add, “I wanted to tell you, that I hope you will be very happy.”

There is broad amazement in his face as he bends down to look at her.

“Thank you ; but what calls forth the hope just now ?”

“She seems to be a very nice girl,” Madge goes on, nearly choking over each word—congratulating a man one loves on his en-

gagement to another woman, is not the pleasantest thing in life,—“a very nice girl indeed. I hope I shall know her better by-and-by.”

“What *are* you talking about?” he interrupts.

“About Miss Westcott, of course!”

“Ah! yes, she is a very nice girl,” he says, carelessly, looking round him as he speaks for a spot where they will not be jostled by the wild waltzers.

“Perhaps they’re engaged privately, and he doesn’t wish to speak about it; well! if that’s the case, the young lady should be a little more discreet,” Madge thinks resentfully, little knowing that discretion and Miss Westcott will never have anything to do with one another; and by this time Phil has selected his spot, and is conveying her to it. And once more they are, comparatively

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speaking, isolated and far from observation. As soon as they stand still, he asks,—

“Shall I meet with a welcome if I come to Halsworthy?”

“Yes; and so you will if you come to Moorbridge House,” Madge responds promptly, though she is thinking the while, “how odious it will be if he rides over with that overpowering girl, and expects me to admire her feats of noble horsemanship!”

“Then I shall come,” Phil says, gravely and steadily; “it was for this that I asked you to wait. Perhaps I am not justified in what I have done, under all circumstances; perhaps I have taken an unwarrantable liberty, as you made no sign of wishing to continue on friendly terms with me; tell me? have I?”

“How can he dare to suppose that his engagement makes any difference in my feelings

towards him!" Madge thinks, angrily, and her anger makes her tone cold, and her words tart.

"You forget that I have had no opportunity of making such a sign; however, now I tell you, I shall be very glad to see you if I'm at home when you visit Mrs. Henderson; and now I must release Aunt Lucy, if you please."

Her words and manner damp him dreadfully; he leads her to her friends, cloaks her, takes her to her carriage in glum, unhappy silence. He considers that she has pointedly expressed to him her desire that they should be on merely friendly terms, and these are not nearly sufficient to content him as he thinks of her and her pleasant beauty and sweetness.

Altogether the hunt ball is a failure as far as these two young people are concerned;

but it has been one of long-continued triumph to Miss Westcott.

The Westcotts are going to stay in Win-staple until after the county-ball, which is to take place two days after the hunt ball. The Westcotts' home life is easy and unfettered enough, but they seem to revel in greater freedom still, now that they are staying away, with all the conditions of their daily life altered. Miss Westcott makes her own arrangements at the hunt ball, and informs her friends what they (the arrangements) are, the next morning at breakfast.

“ We shall be out nearly all day, mamma,” she begins ; “ we arranged a riding party last night to start at eleven this morning.”

“ Who is going ? ” Phil asks.

“ Why you, of course, and six other men, and my sister and myself.”

“ Are you the only ladies ? ”

"Happily we are," Miss Westcott laughs out merrily.

Now Phil has made up his mind that he will go to Halsworthy this morning, therefore the plan Miss Westcott has made for him is obnoxious ; but he has a dread of rousing suspicion, and of hearing any chaffing allusion made to Madge, and he knows well that the Miss Westcotts are proficient in the art of chaff, and fearless in their use of that art, therefore he is in a cleft stick.

"I shall not be able to go at eleven, for I shall be engaged with Ronald till long after that."

"Poor boy ! are you going to punish him for his ebullition of last night, by making him work to-day ? If I were Ronald, I'd rebel ; you wouldn't get me to work, Phil, during the Winstaple week."

"Don't incite him to rebellion, that's all I

ask of you," Phil says, getting up, and walking away to the door to avoid further discussion ; but before he can get himself out of the room, Miss Westcott is gaily dancing after him.

"My dear Phil, I'll wait till one rather than go without you ; come! that's a concession you wouldn't get your grand Miss Roden to make ; she was absolutely huffy at your asking her to wait a minute in the corridor last night, when you were called to put a stop to Ronald's war-dance. *I'll* wait till one, and disappoint the rest for you—there !"

"My dear," her mother says, when the girl returns after having wrung an ungracious assent from Phil, "Phil Fletcher will think you value his society very highly, and other people will think something else."

It is the most direct reproof the girl has

ever received from her mother, and it has the surprising effect on Miss Westcott, of making her "think."

Now the result of "thought" on such a subject in a vigorous young mind like Miss Westcott's, is often extremely deleterious to others. She sums up the whole business succinctly and speedily. She is in love with Phil Fletcher, and of course "Phil Fletcher is in love with her!"

Naturally, having come to this conclusion, when she next meets Phil—which is just as they are about to start for their ride—she behaves like the pure-minded, honest-hearted young idiot she is ; blushes scarlet, and fears in her confused enlightenment that he must have thought her very bold and forward for asking him to come to-day, and her blushing embarrassment is contagious ; Phil catches it, wonders what the girl is thinking of, and why



she drops her eyes before his in a way she never did before, and wishes, with all his power of wishing, that he had stood to his guns, and refused to have joined the riding-party this day.

He has a fair excuse for keeping rather aloof from the rest, in the presence of his pupil, by whose side he rides slightly in the rear of the others. Ronald has a headache, and is generally low and penitential. He is the son of a rich mother, but he has not the money to pay for his escapade of last night, and Phil has insisted that Ronald shall tell the whole truth about the broken looking-glass, when he makes the application to Mrs. Westcott for money to pay for it.

It is a bright, crisp winter day, and the atmosphere has such an exhilarating effect on Miss Westcott, that the girl forgets her embarrassment, and the cause of it, and

resumes her normal manner to the extent of reining up for Phil to ride by her. "I do like this kind of thing," she says, in a glow ;  
- "riding through villages that we don't know the names of—that we've never seen before, and probably shall never see again—I do like it, don't you?"

"Yes," Phil answers, hesitatingly ; "but I think—why surely, yes, I have seen this one before."

"We are in the High-street of Halsworthy," one of the men in advance shouts back. And then they both remember the place, and the occasion of their former visit to it.

"We drove your cousin and you once to Moorbridge House, to be sure, and regarded him as the master of it almost ; how *could* that girl break it off ; I do think it cruel, don't you, Phil ?"

120     “‘HE COMETH NOT,’ SHE SAID.”

“I know nothing of the circumstances of the case,” he says, tersely. “I only know that she is incapable of cruelty.”

“It’s such a charming old house, full of carvings and pictures, and all sorts of queer old things,” Miss Westcott kindly explains to anyone who will listen to her ; “we had such a jolly lunch there when Mr. Fletcher did the honours to us. Look here, Phil,” she adds, suddenly, “why shouldn’t we call on Miss Roden now ?”

“Such a party of us,” Phil protests, a thrill of utter aversion to the plan she has mooted, possessing him. But Miss Westcott is pertinacious.

“The size of the party is nothing against our going. I should be delighted to see a regiment ride up to our house any day—and every day—as far as that goes ; and I do want to see if she’s quite in harmony with

her house ; besides, we're neighbours ; we ought to call ; give me a pencil and I'll write mamma's name on my card—and please make haste."

Unwillingly enough he gives her the pencil, but he cannot prevent Miss Westcott from calling on anyone she pleases—he realises this truth perfectly. As he returns his pencil to his pocket, he says,—

"Ronald and I will ride on."

"If you do I shall think you very unkind ; and surely Miss Roden will think it very impolite when I tell her that you came actually to her gates, and wouldn't come in."

"You wouldn't tell her."

"Yes, I would, Phil ; I shall be vexed enough to say anything if you don't come. I ought to call, you know," she adds, persuasively, "because when we were left together last night, we quite made friends."

It is Miss Westcott's happy idiosyncrasy to believe invariably that she quite “makes friends” with everyone she meets, and as a rule she is justified in her belief.

Carried by her eloquence, or her will, or by some unknown force in his own nature which he cannot gainsay, Phil rides on into the grounds of Moorbridge House. Rides on in front with brilliant Miss Westcott, and the rest of the cavalcade follow them along the avenue.

Madge has stayed at home all this morning. It is in vain that her aunt has impressed upon her at brief intervals that there is nothing like a brisk walk for wearing off fatigue. Madge declares that she is not in the least fatigued, and that therefore the walk would be a work of supererogation. She does not even go down to the village. She does not even go to the big pond that is

frozen over, and which is out of sight of the house. "And all the winter you've been wishing for a good frost that you might have some skating!" Aunt Lucy complains pathetically.

Phil has asked her for a welcome, and she has promised him one ; and after a night's meditation she is not sorry for it. No false shame shall keep her from giving him a full and hearty one whenever he comes, and something tells her he will come to-day.

She and her golden greyhound, and her three peacocks, as they strut round her for food, make a bright picture enough on the terrace. Madge is in green velvet (that gleams like an emerald when the sun shines on it), and beaver-skin to-day, and in her Tyrolean hat one metallic-looking feather glistens. She is all warmth and light as she hears the sound of horses' feet. She looks

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up with a face fair as the day, and rosy as the morn, and sees Phil and Miss Westcott riding towards her.

## CHAPTER VI.

“WHO LOVES—YET DOUBTS.”

MADGE makes no sign of being punished by the spectacle advancing at a hand canter towards her. She is punished horribly ; but she is as game as one of her own Exmoor red-deer, or as one of the best of the hounds that are always hungering for the destruction of the aforesaid red-deer. There is no shadow of the exquisite pain at her heart, tinging either her face or her manners, as she quietly frees herself from the greyhound and the peacocks that are parading around her, and advances to offer greetings to her guests.

It is the most crushing, convincing proof



that could have been offered her of Phil's allegiance being due to this frank-faced young lady, who so cheerfully takes it for granted that Madge is as delighted to see her, as she is to come to Moorbridge House. By the time the vanguard have come up, and Madge has ascertained something of the nature of the honour thus thrust upon her, all doubts (they were very few and weak at first) as to the propriety of her conduct have fled from Miss Westcott's mind. In her young, strong, hearty appreciation of the out-of-course character of the proceeding, she is on the brink of explaining to Madge how and with whom she had last entered the house. She gets as far, in fact, as “Oh! Miss Roden, do you know when I came here——” and then she stops abruptly, and colours freely, and looks in helpless appeal to Phil to come to the rescue.

But Madge does not catch the sentiment, she fails even to catch the sense of this speech. All her faculties are fully engaged in the task of subduing the slightest sign of the suffering she is enduring. And she masters her task gallantly, as only a thorough-bred creature can. The recollection that she is the sole representative of a race that has been honoured and honourable in the county for generations, comes to her as a timely aid. She is all the "young lady of the land"—she is all that the most jealous lover of Madge Roden could desire her to be—and nothing more, as she makes a graceful welcome for these unbidden guests.

There is not the slightest doubt about her being in harmony with her house, as she leads the way into it with Miss Westcott by her side. This young girl of twenty-one has

all the machinery of hospitality ready to her hand ; but what is even more, she has the talent and the tact to work it well. “It’s just time for luncheon,” she says to Miss Westcott, as she walks on, and then she looks and nods slightly to the servant who is holding the door. In that nod there is a whole volume of directions, for in this house the servants catch the spirit of the wishes of their young mistress with marvellous promptitude.

“Thank you ; it would be delightful to lunch here again—I mean it would be delightful, but we’re such a throng,” Miss Westcott says, tripping up in her speech and reminiscences. And then Madge offers a comprehensive explanation that it will be “delightful to her too.”

She takes her guests into the room where her own portrait hangs, and where Aunt

Lucy is sitting, a little out of gear already, by reason of the re-appearance of a Philip Fletcher—it doesn't much matter which it is—they have both been disturbing elements in Madge's life.

When she sees the troop by whom he is accompanied, her sense of the untowardness of it all deepens. A hoard of barbarians from the hills would have been as welcome to Aunt Lucy, who looked upon casual people as a branch of human suffering from which the upper classes should be exempt.

But her conventional ice has to thaw, her conservatism has to give way before the warm and steady way in which poor Madge decides on carrying on the war. Aunt Lucy is always made of full account in the house by her niece, but there is not the slightest doubt in the minds of anyone of those who

have invaded this territory, as to which is the reigning queen of it.

“Aunt,” she says, as Phil goes up to shake hands with the old lady, “Mr. Fletcher and his friends will lunch with us presently ;” and while Aunt Lucy is still writhing under this intelligence, for her gloomy imagination foresees more love-making, more engagements, and, finally, more abrupt and inexplicable terminations to the same ; while she wrestles unsuccessfully with these dark prophetic pangs, Madge carries her visitors off to the “observatory” in a whirl, from which she does not dare to cease.

“It would be odious to fall flat, because—someone has done something I never thought he would do,” Madge tells herself ; but all the while she is taking Miss Westcott’s measure most accurately, and cannot find that young lady deserving mentally of her

friend Phil. "She would do so well for Grif," Madge thinks ; " why won't the right people come together."

The "observatory," as it is euphemistically called at Moorbridge House, is simply a square planked surface, guarded by wide-apart rails, and protruding from one of the shelving sides of the house. The ascent to it is by a wide, flat-stepped ladder outside the house. Altogether it is a perilous-looking place, fragile and steep, and as such Miss Westcott feels disinclined to scale it. "I think—I don't care for views," she says, in a tone that is both deprecating and explanatory. "I don't care for views, and I get giddy if I go up ladders, so don't mind me."

She shouts this to Madge, who is already half way up the "look out," or observatory ; and Madge smiles a bland assent, and

graciously continues to lead the way for those whose love of scenery or sensation will take them up to one of the best artificial “look-outs” in this boundary land. It is not until she gains the summit, that she realises that she is alone here with Phil ; that all the rest have elected to remain below with their liege lady of the hunt.

She commences doing the honours in a hurried manner, that is neither polite nor politic, for it proves her ill at ease, and Phil all the while is most mournfully self-possessed—like one unto whom Fate has done her worst.

Madge turns from side to side, and airily indicates everything, or rather endeavours to indicate everything that is within their range of vision. And Phil doubles her difficulties by abstractedly gazing at her, and her only.

Presently the frosty air, and the tension of

her nerves, causes a perceptible shiver to run through her frame, which she tries to explain away by drawing back abruptly from the rail she has been leaning against, and saying,—

“Awful a fall would be from here down into that knobby stony courtyard.”

“Are you getting giddy?” he asks, coming a step nearer to her.

“No; but cold, and whenever I’m cold I’m depressed; let us go down.”

“I am giddy with a vengeance,” he says, making a movement to stop her; “the air has intoxicated me, I suppose, given me the false futile courage to tell you that I love you, Miss Roden, though I’m not mad enough to ask you to love me in return.”

He ceases; and Madge stands, her head slightly raised, though her eyes are bent down in order to avoid a gaze whose ardour



she believes to be an insult to her. He can dare to tell her this, while the girl to whom he is engaged is at the foot of the ladder waiting for them. Farewell the cherished romance. Indeed, he is as far from being the realization of her high ideal, as was his cousin. Her inward cry must still be “He cometh not”—the high-souled, honest lover she had taught herself to wait for.

It never enters her mind that it is the view he is having of the extent of the territory over which she reigns, which has impressed him with a sense of his own madness in letting himself love her. Madge is a thorough woman ; she is so much more to herself, than her fat productive acres are to her. She likes being the lady of the land ; but above all things she is Madge.

There is a very brief pause, but it seems a long one to the young man, who is conscious

of his own presumption, not to put the most humiliating interpretation on her silence. Then she says—and her heart does ache to have to say it,—

“You must be giddy, indeed. I am more hurt than I can tell you that you should have thought so lowly of me—and yourself, as to have said that ; for I did hope to keep friends with you.”

The sensations which may be supposed to have beset the bold page who loved the king's daughter, set in strongly in Phil's breast. He had not anticipated such a crushing rebuff as this, though he had told himself repeatedly that he had “no hope.”

“And now have I forfeited your friendship ?”

She tries to lash herself into anger in order that she may not break down and feebly cry over the downfall of her belief in

his being better, and nobler, and truer altogether than any other man.

“Yes, you have,” she says, distinctly ; “you know, all things considered, that your words were an insult ; how could you dare to talk of love to me—situated as you are ?”

“How could I, indeed. I am punished very properly ; Miss Roden you have given me a sharp lesson ; be assured I shall not offend again.”

They have succeeded in perfectly bewildering and mystifying one another, and they both go down smarting and tingling with mortification. “That he should think so badly of me as to believe I’d let another girl’s lover talk of loving me,” Madge thinks. “That she of all girls in the world should come down and crush me with the facts of my position, and pennilessness, and presumption,” poor Phil feels. And he hates beam-

ing, bright, boisterous Miss Westcott for having brought him into this valley of degradation, forgetting that he would have come alone if she had not captured him, and tied him to her chariot wheel.

As far as the two chief actors in the piece are concerned, it moves along very heavily after this. Phil is sick with mortification and disappointment. Madge is shattered by this rude awakening from her day-dream. The others, to be sure, are perfectly at their ease, and seem well able to enjoy their luncheon, in spite of that abstraction on Madge's part which renders her all at once a limp, and inefficient hostess.

His parting words, uttered in haste, but coming as they do, straight from his heart, wring hers horribly, both for him and for herself. Unluckily they only confirm her in her previous belief.

"Forgive me," he says, "I only remembered that you were a woman to be won, and that I was a man who might win ; you have made me repent my want of memory bitterly enough."

"Not more than I do," she answers, softened in spite of her sense of outrage ; "it has shocked me more than I can tell you."

And with these words of doom and dismissal ringing in his ears, he rides away from Moorbridge House by Miss Westcott's side.

By the day of the county ball, Madge is unfit to go to it. "A feverish cold in my head, I think," she says to Mrs. Henderson. "I suppose after that bad attack I wanted a more thorough change of air than I have got by coming from one part of the moor to another." And when she says this, Mrs.

Henderson fully understands that the fever is in Madge's heart..

It is painful to see how the girl wanes after this. How she wearies over the very things that have been wont to interest and amuse her hitherto. The change is not sudden ; but it is anything but slow. A fortnight has not elapsed since those miserable five minutes on the observatory, before the palpable decrease in Madge's bounding vitality startles Mrs. Henderson into making a plan, and wheedling Madge into the belief that she is essential to the proper carrying out of it.

“I am obliged to spend a couple of months in town, dear,” she says to Madge as carelessly as she can ; “business takes me up, and I shall take the opportunity of getting good music lessons for Florry ; you must come with us ? ”

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And after a slight opposition on Madge's part, the plan is put into execution, and she goes up to town the end of March.

## CHAPTER VII.

### LADY TOLLINGTON.

“What matters a little more waiting to one who has waited for years?”

THE six weeks, at the end of which Philip has promised Olive and himself the dubious delight of another meeting, have elapsed, have nearly doubled themselves, in fact, and his onerous duties chain Philip to his post.

But his letters keep alive the flame of her faith in him—she does not even need them to keep alight the fire of her love for him ; but her faith would probably flicker out if he never wrote to her. But he does write, and write very tenderly too, calling her his

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“darling” constantly, and constantly entreating her to tell him that her anxiety to meet him again equals his to meet her. But failing—failing always to say, “Will you marry me, Olive?” or, “Will you be my wife?” or any other definite sentence on which she can lean her tired heart, and let the poor thing be at rest.

She, sitting alone night after night in the dull and little room, which is the only home she has now, draws endless mind-pictures of “Philip, and of what he is doing.” The one she likes best is of him sitting alone in Sir John Tollington’s library, burning the midnight oil, as he has described himself doing more than once. There is an endless round of gaiety in this garrison and sea-port town, he has told her, but he keeps aloof from it as much as he can, for ~~she~~ *she* is not there.

In one respect Olive is happier than she

was when we last saw her, for Madge Roden has sought her out, and compelled her to be glad and rejoice to a certain degree. All bonds of reserve have been burst between the two girls, and it is Olive's greatest pleasure now to hear how it was Philip's irrepressible expression of deep love for herself which brought about the severance between Madge and himself. But though Madge knows Olive's story, Olive does not know Madge's. The Phil episode has been fraught with too much hopeless agony for her to care or to dare to talk about it.

Madge has been in town a month now, hearing almost daily of Phil's mother and sisters from Mrs. Henderson, who visits her old friend constantly. But never hearing Phil's name even ; that, by mutual consent, is sedulously avoided. The hero is fallen, the idol is shattered ; but Madge has not the

courage to question “how far?” or to “what extent?”

The Fletchers, in their humble little home in the unimportant street in Chelsea, get all their convictions on the subject of Madge’s arrogance, and proud sense of her own position, strengthened, as they hear of her being in London, and day after day passes without her crossing their threshold.

“It is evident that she will have nothing to do with any of Philip’s relations, tho’ we’re friends of her friend,” the old lady says with a sigh, for she has an old lady-like curiosity to see this queen of her nephew’s ill-fated romance. And Mrs. Henderson can only speak a platitude by way of reply, for she is feeling sure that Madge does not dare to have anything to do with Phil’s mother and sisters, and that Philip has nothing whatever to do with it.


Meanwhile Philip is making the best of the miserable circumstances which keep him from Olive. His onerous official duties occupy but a small portion of the time. But his ex-official duties are never ending.

Lady Tollington is constantly mounting her throne and waving her sceptre, and her household have a hard time of it. She will insist on being younger, prettier, more attractive, more popular, more hospitable, more talked about, than any one else in the place. She wears the most conspicuous dresses in this place, where the majority seem to aim at dressing conspicuously. She compasses the purchase of a pair of the most striking and spirited cobs to be had in the region round about. Her driving powers are very limited. Even her adoring husband sees and acknowledges to himself that they are. Consequently he gives up a portion of his

secretary's time in order that Lady Tollington may be spared the shock of driving over countless multitudes of the Queen's lieges, or of being upset ignominiously through confusion of mind and the reins.

This post of honour, to do him justice, is not coveted by Philip. But he suffers himself to be thrust into it, partly because the supreme vanity of the woman amuses him, and partly because it is about half a degree less wearisome to him than his proper work.

After all, and considerably to her own surprise, Philip Fletcher is the only young man from whom the Queen of the Port can exact homage. The only young man that is of mark either in manner or appearance. She is too well acquainted with the “quarter-deck” feeling, which obtains in the service for the young commanders and lieutenants who swarm about the place, to think of her



as a desirable shrine. She never for a single instant forgets that she is the much-deferred wife of the Port-admiral ; and so her dream of a perpetually reinforced body-guard of promising young officers, is proved a fallacious one.

In fact, the shallow, vain creature is a failure in this sphere, in spite of her power of entertaining, and her frantic efforts to maintain the supremacy. Prettier women, more fascinating women, attend her *réunions*, and take off the attention which she too palpably demands. In her mean vexation very often she administers undefinable slights and humiliations to these ladies, which, undefinable as they are, are resented by the brother officers of the ladies' husbands. In a short time there are two distinct parties in the place : the Port-admiral's wife against the most shining lights in the company of the wives of

the juniors. And Lady Tollington's party is far from being the strongest, for it is composed of the men who have given up all hopes of fair promotion—men who are demoralised, in short, by long careers of disappointment and neglect. These bow the knee low enough; but it is neither the homage of the heart, nor the homage of taste. It is simply the homage that Failure, crushed down into mean-spiritedness, pays to Success, and Lady Tollington does not value it one jot or tittle.

So in her abandonment by those members of the service to whom she had intended being benignant, she falls back upon Philip with the soothing conviction that, at any rate, he is as handsome, as clever, as entertaining, and distinguished altogether, as any one of those who will not fight under her banner. She makes his position of account in her

house, as only the mistress of a house can make it; and remembers, for everyone's benefit, how "gallantly he had saved her life at the risk of his own."

And Philip, who has no dislike to her, who has, on the contrary, rather a feeling of gratitude towards her for amusing him by her kind and inordinate vanity, allows himself to be mercifully treated, and made of much account in Sir John Tollington's establishment.

"Sir John looks upon him as a son quite, and as for myself, I regard him as a brother," she tells people. And so between the paternal and fraternal feelings which he has brought into play, Philip has a pleasant time of it—although he knows that hope is making the heart of the only woman he loves in the world sick unto death.

For some reason or other, the subtle force



of which he cannot discern, because he is too indifferent to trouble himself about it, Lady Tollington distinguishes Mr. Philip Fletcher even more in public than she does in private. It seems to be her object to make people understand that it is by her own choice that Philip is her sole *aide-de-camp*. And though Philip knows better, still he accepts the situation, for he likes to feel the ball at his feet.

He talks openly enough (when it suits him) to Lady Tollington of his engagement to Miss Roden, and of the narrow escape Moorbridge House has had from having him as its master. But never a word (no one is wholly bad), never a word does he say, or permit Lady Tollington to say, about Olive. And Lady Tollington most thoroughly understands that though Philip values her patronage to a certain degree, because it keeps him in the

quarters he likes, that he would throw it away without an effort if she gave her tongue liberty to utter one slighting, much more one evil, word of Olive.

There is much that is uncongenial to Philip in his easy berth and luxurious home. In the first place, he knows that his position depends on the will of a woman who is as vain as a peacock, and as unstable as water. The lady's talent for ruling developes as opportunities of exercising it are given to her, according to the merciful system of supply and demand. Without any heart, and with very little head, with meagre natural abilities, and absolutely no cultivation, her feminine love of sway enables her to detect and play upon the weakest points of all who come within her jurisdiction. Sir John Tollington unquestionably is good, and brave, and honourable; but he does come within the jurisdiction

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of the lady who owes her greatness to him, and being human he has weak points in his character.

Clear-sighted outsiders, whose daily comfort does not depend upon this lady, sneer contemptuously enough at the old officer's infatuation for the frivolous woman whose frivolity has the demerit of not being designed to please them. But Sir John Tollington only sees in it an ever-changing form of the youthfully exuberant spirit which charmed him into marrying her. And though she is incapable of forming clear and just estimates concerning anything that is a little outside the commonest experience, though she is shallow, though her likes and dislikes are all founded on fancy and never on fact, still he defers to the one, and consults the other, and is generally well-pleased to be guided by that weather-cock,—her will.

And it is her will that Philip Fletcher shall hold a post of her gaining, and occupy a position which she has the power of rendering comfortable or comfortless, just as the whim may seize her. "It must be so mortifying to that upstart, Olive Aveland," she feels, "to know that the man she is foolishly in love with is living by the favour and patronage of her former mistress." She sometimes hardly knows whether it was liking for Philip or hatred of Olive, which made her win this secretaryship for him.

But the chains are very light with which she has shackled him as yet. It is only when he proposes "running up to town for a few days," that she makes him feel them. And then she is too cunning to compromise herself. It is always Sir John who reminds Philip that his presence will be needed at a luncheon or reception. "I am not quite up

to the mark of exerting myself just now," Sir John has fallen into the habit of saying, "and I can't leave it all to Lady Tollington, as it is in her anxiety to save me she never spares herself."

So gradually it comes about that Philip has the management of most things, for Sir John (old brother officers remark with sympathy and sorrow) is less and less "up to the mark" day by day.

In spite of the caution which he exercises in his correspondence with her, in spite of the easy selfishness and love of luxury which permits him to leave her so long in doubt, Philip has the thought of marrying that faithful old love of his very frequently in his mind. He believes himself that he is only waiting on here in order to win a stronger interest from Sir John. When that is secured he believes that he will ask for some better

and more independent post, and that when such an one is secured, he will seek Olive fairly and honestly, and marry her. He really believes that he will do this ; but still he holds back from committing himself to any definite line of action, and refrains from any definite form of words.

And so the weeks pass on, and he reads her letters, and thrills to their tone of suppressed tenderness, and longs to see her as he never has longed, and never will long, to see any other woman in this world. And while he is hesitating and procrastinating, in a way that is wicked by reason of its extreme weakness, a great crash comes, and whatever interest he may have created in Sir John's kindly heart is of no avail.

For Sir John Tollington has died of one of the hidden diseases that make no sign until they have gathered strength to kill without

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giving their victims time to make one struggle against them. And Philip Fletcher is again cast out of a situation, and again made to feel himself the veriest foot-ball of fortune.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“THE ONLY SON OF HIS MOTHER !”

It is a softly brilliant May morning. Sunny reflections, undisturbed even by passing clouds, are lying in broad flashes of golden radiance on the white pavements of the streets, and the tender young greensward of the parks. There is misery, and dimness, and dirt enough not very far from them, lurking in many an unsuspected spot. But from the Apsley House gate down to Kensington Gore, all looks happy, and bright, and clean, and prosperous. And it is between these two places, that Mrs. Henderson and Madge have been walking up and down for an hour.



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“The day is so much more beautiful than any we have had yet,” Madge says, “that I should like to do something quite different with it, to anything we have done yet.”

“What would you like to do with it!”

“I don’t know; we are two lone, lorn women, and so we must go on doing the cut and dried things, I suppose. But if Mr. Henderson were here, I’d make him take me for a prowl.”

“Where would you like to go, Madge; I can take you anywhere you like.”

“No, you can’t, not where I want to go, I’m sure. I only know the bright side of London: now I want to see some of the “haunts” that people shake their heads about: I want to go where there is misery and vice——”

“You needn’t stir a step for that,” Mrs. Henderson interrupts.

“I know that,” Madge says, softly and pathetically; “but I want to see some of the people who haven’t money and friends, and social excitements, to make their trials endurable.”

Mrs. Henderson keeps thoughtfully on her way in silence for a time. Presently she says,—

“I can take you to a house, the inhabitants of which have a heavy trial laid upon them; and you will see how bravely they bear it, though they have very little money, and very few friends, and certainly no social excitements to make it endurable.”

“I should like to go home and get some money first,” Madge begins, and Mrs. Henderson seems embarrassed as she answers,—

“It’s not a case of that kind, dear; it’s not destitution and want in a shocking and repulsive form; how shall I explain it? it’s

160    "‘HE COMETH NOT,’ SHE SAID."

middle-class need and anxiety, Madge, things that you cannot possibly understand."

Madge nods her head sagaciously.

"I see," she says, "the father, the bread-winner, has fallen ill."

"It's a marvel that the bread-winner has not died," Mrs. Henderson says, almost passionately. Then she adds more calmly, "But he is not the father of the family."

Madge gives an uneasy, interrogatory glance.

"You will not see him, he is away ; that he is so is half of their trial ; but, Madge, you won't shrink from seeing his mother and sisters ?"

And then Madge knows that she is being taken to see Phil's family.

It is an experiment, and a doubtful one. Had it been suggested to Mrs. Henderson an hour ago, that she should try it, she

would have disregarded the suggestion, and shrank from the responsibility. But Madge's yearning on this bright day to see something of the darker aspects of life, Madge's craving, when the golden side of the shield was well before her vision, to look at the leaden side also, have melted away all Mrs. Henderson's prudent resolves. "He is not there, and it is well she should see his people exactly as they are; it may rob him of a little of the romance with which she has unconsciously invested him, but on the other she'll know him as *the man he is* the better for it: and they know nothing."

There is comfort and safety in their ignorance, she firmly believes. To old Mrs. Fletcher, Madge will be simply the young lady her nephew won under false pretences, and who finally failed to love him; that

Madge is an object of the dearest, tenderest interest to her son ; that Madge would like nothing better than to ask for a maternal blessing kneeling at her feet ; that Madge has not looked at a newspaper for weeks, for the dread she has of the news of Phil's marriage with Miss Westcott being given to her by some one of their unsympathetic columns ; of all these things which might tend to create confusion, Mrs. Fletcher is blissfully ignorant. And in the knowledge that she is this, Mrs. Henderson is comparatively happy.

The change from flashing fashion, from unmistakable wealth and splendour, to struggling respectability, and then on to actual squalor, can be made in five minutes in any part of London. But in no part of it, I think, can we step from restless, seething To-day, back into quiet, peaceful

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Long Ago, so quickly as we can in the Chelsea and Kensington districts. The city is too full of bustle for its antiquity ever to be apparent to us, save on Winter Sunday afternoons. But let us traverse the byways of Old Chelsea or Kensington when we will, the fact of their being places of the Past left far behind by this whirling age, is always kept steadily before us.

An abrupt turn takes them out of an auriferous square, into a solid sombre-looking street of houses, that from attic to basement speak of monotony, and dulness, and comfort. They have as little to do with the flashing, dashing, whirling, never-at-rest element of the Belgravian square, as they have to do with that which impregnates the little street on the other side of them, into which Madge and her friend are now turning.

A little street that must have been born

about the same time as Hans Place, but born of far poorer parents. A little street full of picturesque inequalities, built of time-browned red brick. A little street that is gently shaken to its centre if a cab drives up to one of its doors, and that would be dangerously agitated if a private carriage rolled through it. A little street that, it is conceded at once, looks as if its inhabitants had never served Mammon with success. But about which there is nothing vulgar, nothing squalid, nothing repulsive.

Mrs. Henderson stops in front of three steep steps, guarded by twisted iron railings, and surmounted by a door, adorned with the traditional brass knocker—a bright, gleaming brass knocker, that betrays no lack of service in the house. And before Madge can make up her mind as to whether she is glad or sorry that she has come, they are

ushered into a room where an elderly lady and two younger ones are sitting.

It is a shock to Madge, for a moment, to see Phil's mother—the one she has learnt to think of as Mrs. Henderson's contemporary as well as her friend—look so very old! Then she realizes that it is ill-health and anxiety that have crushed the middle-aged woman into this semblance of old age. And instantly after this, she realizes that the kind eyes smiling at her, the kind voice welcoming her, are just like Phil's.


The girl feels like an impostor, when Mrs. Henderson introduces her to them. She knows that Chrissy and Mabel are attributing the changing colour in her face, to her remorseful recollections of their Cousin Philip. "If they only knew; *if* they could only guess" who it was, the thought of



whom was making her tingle with mingled love and humiliation.

Whatever the trouble that may be pressing upon them—and that trouble in some form or other is pressing upon them heavily, is evident from that air of sorrowful suspense which hangs about them like a cloud—but whatever it may be, they do not bring it to the fore. They are all three of them taken by that air of deprecation which Madge cannot help infusing into her manner. They think her penitent about the broken engagement, and anxious to make them like her for Philip's sake. “Perhaps,” Chrissy whispers to Mabel, “this is but a preliminary step ; no doubt it will come on again.”

By tacit consent they all avoid mentioning Philip. In fact, to tell the truth, it would be hard for them to mention him, for they love the ne'er-do-well heartily still,



and he has shunned them, and cut himself off from them in a way that each one of these three women has been weak enough to weep about. They belong to the order who cannot endure to see Time treading on the graves of affection. He has bruised their hearts horribly, but he has failed in hardening them.

Presently—choosing it in the beautiful faith of its being the one topic in the world in which there cannot be pain to any human being—Mrs. Fletcher introduces the subject of her son.

"Chrissy goes to her brother to-morrow," she says in a tone that tells a little of the enormous amount of calculation and resolution which has been brought to bear on the final decision.

"You have not heard from him, then?" Mrs. Henderson says so sympathetically,

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that Madge looks up questioningly, startled, smitten with a sudden conviction that it is some “evil which has happened to Phil!” this trial which the Fletchers are bearing bravely.

Her whole face works with piteous emotion, and in the midst of her generous agitation, she is horribly perplexed as to what she “shall do with a big tear that will roll down presently, and be an unbecoming inconvenience.” His mother sees something of all this : for Madge is not one of the vapid, colourless, bloodless creatures who fail in portraying agitation ; she does it only too vividly, only too well.

“My dear,” Mrs. Fletcher says, won to familiar tenderness by the girl’s sympathetic face, “you know my son a little, don’t you ? I suppose Mrs. Henderson has told you of our unhappiness ; he is dangerously ill.”

Madge is not the type of girl who gurgles herself off into hysterics, or falls senseless at the feet of the person nearest to her.

"The sun is in my face," she says, rising up with dazzled eyes and a dazed brain, but speaking steadily and stepping firmly ; then she seats herself by Mrs. Fletcher, and says, "tell me about it ; yes, I know him very well."

A succession of quick questioning glances are flashed from the mother and two sisters at Mrs. Henderson. They say plainly, as words can say, "Why have you kept this from her ; you seemed to feel keen interest." But Mrs. Henderson cannot make answer. She cannot tell them that she does not dare speak about a sorrow that is very near to her—to this daughter of her love, because she is in a mist as to why the girl never names him, and why he has withdrawn

himself so utterly from them. She dares not tell them this : and so she only says in reply to their half-reproachful looks—

“It is a relief to me, it must be an intense one to you, that Chrissy has made up her mind to go to her brother ; you will be spared the racking suspense you’re suffering from now at any rate.”

“Yes, Chris has promised to write every day,” Mabel says.

“And I shall send a telegram as soon as I get down to him,” Chrissy adds. And then Madge screws up her courage to the point of asking,—

“Is he at Delabourn, still ?”

“Oh, no !” Mrs. Fletcher says, shaking her head, regretfully ; “was it there you saw him last ?”

“No,” Madge interrupts, hastily ; “I never saw him there ; the last time I saw

him, he came to call on me with " (and now her face flames) "Miss Westcott."

"Ah, yes," Mrs. Fletcher resumes, "he was with them then, and very happy and comfortable he must have been with them, I'm sure, dear boy, from all I heard of their kindness; but there was an unpleasantness between the mother of his pupil and Phil; something happened at a ball, that she didn't like, and she accused Phil of neglect; and he gave up his appointment—and poor fellow——" there is a pause, and the mother is crying.

"And——" Madge says, suggestively and breathlessly,—

"And he hasn't been fortunate enough to secure another as yet," Chrissy says, quietly. "Mamma, dear, don't give way; let us hope for better days; I feel we shall see some of the silver lining soon."

"The cloud has overshadowed us for a long time," Mrs. Fletcher says, trying to subdue her inclination to go on raining down these idle tears; "it's hard, terribly hard to feel I can do nothing for my boy," she cries, catching hold of Mrs. Henderson's hand, "my dear, you're mercifully spared this—you'll never be a weight on a child you love."

"If I had a son like Phil, I should be glad to be dependent on him," Mrs. Henderson says, calmly, as the two daughters press round Mrs. Fletcher, and strive to soothe her out of her unwonted excitement. And then, as the mother lies back sobbing, broken down by her own words, and by the superb, loving sympathy that gleams in Madge's eyes, Mrs. Henderson takes up the thread of the story, and tells it briefly and succinctly.

"He came up to town and relinquished his charge of the lad who broke the looking-

glass, and tried for one or two things in the city, but failed in getting either of them, for some reason or other. Then he went down to Ilfracombe, in answer to an advertisement for a secretary: got it, and set to work on his recognised duties by day, and on literary work at night: he did too much, poor boy, broke down, and has been dangerously ill for weeks."

Madge gasps, "Where is Miss Westcott?"

"I really cannot tell you," Mrs. Henderson says, coldly, for she is beginning to understand some things that have been mysterious to her hitherto. It grieves her to do so, but she can no longer doubt that her clever, keen-sighted, superior Madge has fallen into the error of being jealous of the overwhelming young colt who treated Phil with the freedom of a big boy.

The question seems altogether irrelevant to



the Fletchers. What can it possibly matter to any of them where Miss Westcott is? It seems almost indifferent apathy on Miss Roden to ask them about an outsider, whom they neither know nor care about, while Phil, the best and dearest son and brother in the world, is ill and away from them—is dying and desolate for aught they know.

But Madge is pertinacious.

“She knows of his illness, doesn’t she?” she falters out. At the moment she feels capable of any amount of self-abnegation. She could almost bring herself to write a gentle letter of information concerning him to the girl whom she believes will be Phil’s wife if he lives.

If he lives! And if he dies, she (Madge) will have to bear the bitter knowledge that another woman will have a closer right to mourn for him than she has. Nevertheless,

feeling this thrillingly as she does, she says,—

"She knows of his illness, doesn't she?"


"No—that is, not that we know of; why should they? Phil's connection with the family was broken off naturally when Ronald ceased to be his pupil."

Madge wonders vaguely for half a moment, then her perplexity words itself.

"You don't mean to say that his engagement was broken off when his pupil left him?"

"Why *of course* it was," Chrissy says, beginning to think that Madge is rather an obtuse young person. And then, as poor Madge ponders upon this enigma, Chrissy and her sister resume the important subject of the journey that is to be taken to-morrow.

"You see it hasn't been convenient to get summer things yet," Chrissy says naturally



offering the excuse that need usually makes for inadequate supplies. "We all thought a black alpaca the very best thing for a sick-room, so Mabel and I have run one up."

"Won't black alpaca be rather a gloomy dress?" Madge says, unthinkingly. She remembers Phil's ardent, genuine admiration for all the brightness with which she was wont to surround herself, and she throbs with pained pity for his weary eyes, if they are condemned to open with returning health on Chrissy in black alpaca.

"We have brightened it up with blue," Chrissy goes on explaining, and Madge thinks the dress must closely resemble a bruise in its worst stage. But she throws this minor consideration aside in order to listen with absorbed attention to the detailed narration of Chrissy's contemplated plan of action.

"I shall tell them honestly at the hotel that a room on the top story will suit me very well," Chrissy declares prudentially. "I shall be in it very little wherever it is; for the few minutes I shall be out of Phil's room it won't matter where I am, will it?"

She appeals in a flush of sisterly love, anxiety, and sympathy to her audience, embracing them all as it were. And Madge loses her head—loses her self-command—loses her fortifying thoughts of Miss Westcott's rights, and responds for everyone with a gracious abandonment that only belongs to Madge,

"No, no, no, it won't matter to you, you love him so; and *we* will go down with you, won't we?" (appealing to Mrs. Henderson); "you sha'n't take that journey in despair alone." And in this unpremeditated way, as much to her own surprise as to anyone

else's, Madge stands forth as the friend of the family she has this day seen for the first time.

There would be something narrow, meagre, uncharitable, Mrs. Henderson feels, in checking such an outburst. So she assents with moderation.

“I shall be glad to go and get the latest news of Phil,” she says, “and if you're as tired of town as I am, Madge——”

“Tired—I'm sick of it.”

“Then,” the elder lady goes on, “Ilfracombe will be as good as any other place for you, and Chrissy will have a less wretched journey if we are with her, and altogether it seems to me to be the best arrangement we can come to.”

And by the time Mrs. Henderson has said this, Madge is back bending over his mother, and saying,—

"I'll send you a telegram the minute we arrive, and I'll write to you by every post. And—you *will* feel glad that I am there, sharing all Chrissy's anxieties, won't you?"

How is it that the name falls so trippingly from her tongue? How is it that they all omit to marvel why it does so?

Without any effort, without any exaggerated display of feeling or sentiment concerning their sorrow, she has succeeded in identifying herself with their anticipations and dreads. And Chrissy goes on discussing the preparations she is making for her necessarily limited travelling wardrobe, as freely as if Madge had been one of them for years.

The surroundings are all very prosaic the next morning when Chrissy comes into the room to join the two friends who have called for her. But, prosaic as they are,


there is powerful pathos in the quiet parting which ensues between the daughter and the mother—the poor helpless mother, who has been accustomed for many years to lean solely on the son who is now stricken down out of her reach. In such a sorrow-bourn as this is, there is a poetry and dignity which no external accessories, however puerile or prosaic these may be, can destroy.

They make the journey—these three sisters of mercy unavowed—in the usual time and way, and reach the monster hotel just as the clanging gong gives the signal for the *table d'hôte*. “It’s enough to clash him into his grave,” Madge is feeling hotly, but she cools down to an almost death-like chill, as, in answer to Chrissy’s eager question, the hall porter says that “the poor gentleman is past hearing that—or anything else.”

## CHAPTER IX.

“ WORSE THAN ‘ A MISTAKE.’ ”

OLIVE AVELAND is still making her home in the house of the kind country-woman who does not look upon her young lodger as a mere machine by which money is to be made. But she no longer bears the burden of the jackets and mantles at “ Barr and Battles.” That phase of suffering is lived through, left behind, done with altogether. For the uncle, who had been inveterate against her, and callous about her while he lived, has lately died. And while dying he relented, and left her a hundred a year out of the many





thousands which he had been in the habit of promising her before she disappointed him.

It is not much, but it is enough to make Olive Aveland as happy as she ever will be until Philip comes to her for life. It is enough to enable her to fling free of her thralldom. It is enough to justify her in standing aside from the rugged road which those must tread who labour to live. On it she can balance herself, as it were, while she takes a quiet survey of the possibilities still left to her. Now that all cause for hurry and anxiety is over, the congenial and remunerative employment which she sought for vainly in her hour of need will be found easily enough, she knows. For sharp experience has taught Olive the absolute truth of the words, “Unto him who hath, shall be given.”

She has heard from Philip of Sir John

Tollington's death, and of the consequent downfall of some of Philip's intentions. And at last, in spite of her injunction and threat, he has mentioned Lady Tollington. But Olive is very tolerant to the mention, indeed she is almost gratified by it, for it is to the following effect :

“The widow has departed for her home in the Highlands with her serfs, and her ponies and their bells, and her new set of mourning jewellery, leaving me to settle everything here. I shall be heartily glad when I can make my farewell bow to everything connected with the business and get up to town. And I think I shall not be alone in my gladness.”

There can be no doubt of it. He is her own Philip still. That woman, with her wealth and her wiles, is nothing to him.

She is so softened by her comparative

happiness and prosperity, and her absolute contentment with the temporary aspect of affairs, that she actually does not repel Griffiths Poynter's aunt when that lady makes weak overtures of friendship to her. That she does it at her nephew's instigation, probably at his positive command, Olive feels. But in her new satisfaction with the world, and tolerance towards her fellow-creatures, she is not disposed to quarrel with the motive, provided the manner be seemly.

The motive of the old lady's mission is soon made manifest. Griffiths is in London again, passing a purgatorial period for the sake of the bare chance he has of catching a passing glimpse sometimes of the one who makes his Paradise. He wants—he yearns to see her again, that poor, friendless, helpless one, who will not let him befriend or

help her. So he sends his aunt to try and make terms of common courtesy at least, with the girl who no more realizes his worth than she does the worthlessness of Philip Fletcher.

But the temporary relief she is enjoying render her very amenable to the advances of a would-be social ally. In her new-benignant mood she does not scout and scoff at the idea of Grif basking in the rays of her friendly smiles. And in her new-born independence she is free to accept his aunt's invitation to luncheon.

They come for her on the day appointed in a refulgent carriage, selected by Griffiths for the occasion, and Grif himself is there with his back to the horses, with his long legs screwed up, with his feet crushing the bloom off his aunt's rich new mourning silk, and with his most acid cousin by his side.

Nevertheless he is happy ; for facing him is Olive with a face like a carnation—with happy gleaming velvet eyes—with a mouth that curves and quivers with smiles—in perfect possession of her full heritage of youth and beauty. And while looking at her as admiringly as he dares, Griffiths thinks, “She is getting over her regard” (he can’t bring himself to speak of it as “love”) “for that fellow, and in time——” he does not actually word what his belief in what time will accomplish is, but he, too, is quite contented with things as they are, in spite of his cramped position.

Everybody is in town again, for it is June, and the flowers and foliage in the parks leave one no excuse for indulgence in longing for any sylvan scenes. They take one turn along the drive to look at the riders in the Row, and then pull up on the verge of a

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crush of carriages, the occupants of which are waiting and watching.

One brougham, the horses wearing crape rosettes, the servants in sable liveries, cuts into the inner circle adroitly, and is then brought up almost in a line with the barouche in which Olive is. A fair vivacious face, framed in light hair and a widow's bonnet, looks through the open window, and in a moment the vivacious look is chased away by one of vexation and surprise. And Olive recognises Lady Tollington just as she gives the order to drive on sharply, in a strained soprano.

The mere sight of the woman has a baneful effect on Olive. She cannot combat the sense of depression, of helplessness and exhaustion, which this vision of Lady Tollington produces. As she leans back with her face actually fading from that sickness

of the soul which debilitates the strongest at times, Grif's cousin says, with animation,—

“What a handsome man with that widow lady,” and Olive understands at once why her spirit had faltered, and fainted within her.

That hateful, rich, free woman has got Philip for the time being; got him by her side, got him slaving and struggling to settle her affairs probably—those odious affairs which, when settled, will enable her to present herself in a fairer light than heretofore before the eyes of men. Small wonder, that her face fades, and heart quails, and her faith falters as she thinks of all these things.

The graciousness of the day is over for her from that moment. She answers well-meant remarks about people, and places, and current events in monosyllables. In her restlessness, in her eager desire to get rid

of the time that must intervene before she can get home and think about it all, free from the constraining influence of other people's eyes, she leans forward a little, and says, addressing Griffiths,—

"Can *you* bear this much longer? I should have thought you were the last man in the world who would care to sit still and be stared at by, and stare at, a section of the world of which you know nothing."

There is angry impatience, suppressed but apparent still, in her voice and bearing. And without being conscious of the cause of it, Griffiths compassionates her largely.

"You are tired, Miss Aveland ; it is quite time we went home."

Griffiths's cousin gives herself a little shake as he gives the order "home." She is antipathetic to Olive, and has been so from the first moment of her hearing that uncon-



scious damsel's name. It seems to her now that Miss Aveland has given her a fair and tangible cause of animosity. How can that interloper be justified in the audacity which has made her suggest a move to Griffiths before either of his lawful relations have deigned to it? Griffiths is perfectly well acquainted with every signal of distress that is comprised in the cousinly code. And he understands well now that Olive has done violence to one of the family articles of faith in his being their own legitimate property to have and to hold. But though this knowledge pains him, for he is amiably desirous that everyone should lovingly go into bondage to the girl he adores, Olive's worn, weary, burnt-out expression pains him far more, and renders him oblivious to everything but her wishes.

There is a room called the "young ladies"

boudoir" in the house in which Olive chokes over her luncheon this day, and thither the cousin who had accompanied "mamma and Grif" on the expedition in quest of Olive wends her way with fleet footsteps, as soon as they reach home. "The girls" are all assembled here, for it is the place where the sewing-machine dwells, the place where all the excellent works of the Miss Wainwrights are carried on in fact. Therefore here the tale of the delinquent Olive's audacity is carried, and she is torn to tatters.

"She had been flattering and fawning on Grif the whole way. Smiling with her eyes so" (and the aggrieved Miss Wainwright depicts, as accurately as her inefficient eyes and brows will admit of her doing, the sunny dancing smile which had beamed on Grif from Olive Aveland many times during this morning's drive), "and then she suddenly thought she

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would show *us* how fully her power is established, and how little she means to consult *us* ; and we were ordered ‘home’ before I could recover my breath.”

“She took *that* upon herself!” says one.

“She evidently knows nothing of society, and poor Grif must be saved from her in spite of himself.”

“She *must* be taught her place, and Grif must be told what a fearful risk he will run if he places his happiness in the hands of a creature who tries to humiliate his relations —relations whom her eally honours and esteems.”

“We can settle all this by-and-by. Meanwhile, where is the girl? Under mamma’s wing?” this from a practical Miss Wainwright, who believes in taking care of the present, and permitting the past and the future to look after themselves.



“I believe she’s in the drawing-room with Grif!” several of them chorus, and then they flock away to the drawing-room, and find even as their prophetic hearts had foreboded, that Grif and Olive are together, untrammelled by the presence of any third person.

Poor Grif! they really need not grudge him those five acid, penitential minutes that he has spent with her.. Olive, like many another woman whose mind is surcharged with an impatient anxiety she cannot share with anyone, portrays that she is feeling it, by a manner that is alternately aggravatingly indifferent and irritatingly petulant. Griffiths, utterly unable to arrive at any natural and reasonable solution of the change that has come over her, accounts for it to himself in a thoroughly manly way. “Poor thing, she must have a headache,” he thinks compas-

sionately, in his ignorance of the fact that a headache never exterminates the feminine desire to please with anything like the fell completeness of a heartache.

“Do you know I don’t think London air good for you at all,” he says, deprecatingly; “you’re not like the same girl you were at Halsworthy.”

Olive at this rouses herself from a relapse into lassitude to say, with angry vigour,—

“How should I be! I am older, consequently uglier, consequently less inclined to be satisfied with anything or anybody, including myself.”

Wistfully he looks at her.

“You want change of scene and change of air; if you would only let my aunt propose a little plan we have thought of to you——”

Olive waves her hand impatiently to stop. “I can’t bear little plans that other people

make ; and more than that, I know your aunt is quite guileless of making any little plans on my behalf ; it would be kinder on your part, Mr. Poynter, to leave me to my own devices, than to prompt other people to worry me with suggestions that I won't attend to ; what is it that you want me to do now ?” she goes on with human inconsistency.

“ We thought—I thought if you like, that a few weeks down at my place with my aunt and cousins might do you good ; don't think that I would inflict my society on you, Miss Aveland,” the good-natured fellow goes on eagerly.

“ You don't mean to say that you would be heartless enough to leave me to the tender mercies of your aunt and cousins, do you ?” Olive laughs. “ Why they don't like me ! imagine my being cooped up in a country

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place with a band of girls who believe that I am trying to weave a web for your destruction.”

“They can’t think that.” Grif is scarlet at the bare thought of it, and almost paralyzed to hear Olive alluding to a possibility that is so precious to him, in such a matter-of-fact way.

“One never knows what jealous people think,” Olive says, carelessly. “No, Mr. Poynter ; when you have a nice, pretty wife to welcome me, I’ll be your guest willingly enough. I wonder what your wife will be like ?” she adds, with a slight increase of animation. “I should like to choose her.”

“You’re very kind,” he says, in a mortified tone. But Olive disregards his obvious repugnance to the subject, and goes on,—

“I know so well the sort of girl to suit you much better than you know yourself,

though perhaps you don't think so ; it would have been a great mistake if Madge had married you——”

“It would,” he interrupts, “for I shouldn't have given dear Madge the love another woman has won for me.”

“And *I* should have been worse than a mistake, I should have been a ghastly error,” she goes on with cutting emphasis. Then her face softens and saddens, and she adds almost tenderly,—

“Don't you see that I'm wretched, Griffiths ? Wretched, and uncertain, and afraid to think of what I may have to bear ; don't you add to my wretchedness by having a relapse ; let me drift quite away from you ; it worries me to think that you should take more thought and trouble about me than—other people do.”

These are her last words before his cousins





come to the rescue. They need not, in very truth, grudge him those five miserable minutes.

The luncheon might be a funeral feast for the gloom that overspreads it. Griffiths is so palpably dejected that his relations are justified in their supposition that he has proposed to, and been accepted by, Olive. It is a relief to everyone of them when the blissful moment arrives for Olive to take her departure.

There is balm of Gilead still for the Miss Wainwrights in the way in which Griffiths refrains from offering to be Olive's escort. It dispels their doubts. It relights the torch of hope in their virgin hearts. It causes them to be in charity with all men for an hour or two, and emboldens to put a leading question or two to moody, subdued Grif.

"Doesn't it strike you that there is some-

thing very odd in Miss Aveland's manner, Grif?—that cloak of reserve is worn to conceal *something* depend upon it."

"If I were a man I should so dread marrying a girl who seemed to have a secret," the practical Miss Wainwright observes; "when I asked Miss Aveland just now how long she should remain in London, she said there was no more certainty about her future, than there is about the fate of a piece of thistle-down; fancy a woman confessing herself to be such a mere foot-ball of fortune."

"Did you say anything to her, Grif, about going down to the country with us?"

"Yes," Griffiths answers, curtly.

"And she——?"

"Most distinctly refused to go."

"Ah! Well I'm glad she has so much discretion; it would have been a most compromising step for you, and might have led

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to remarks that would have made you feel as if you ought to take a step that you never contemplated : don't you agree with me, mamma ? ”

There is angry contempt on Griffiths's face, and his aunt is a wise woman.

“ We may be quite sure, my dear, that your cousin will never be hurried into any line of conduct that is not *most* judicious ; and as regards Miss Aveland, I regret very much indeed that we shall not have her society.”


Poor Mrs. Wainwright has served a sharp apprenticeship to the trade of watching the way the wind blows !

## CHAPTER X.

### BROKEN DOWN !

THE Doctor, who has been in constant attendance on Phil from the commencement of the latter's illness, is coming down stairs hastily as Chrissy, stultified by the news abruptly rendered up to her by the hall-porter, stumbles up. As he passes her, in utter unconsciousness of her being the sister of his patient, words of life fall from his lips upon the ears of the three women who have just been crushed by the words of doom.

“Stop that infernal clanging, for mercy's sake ; if Mr. Fletcher is roused from his first



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natural sleep, I'll charge the whole concern with manslaughter.”

He is a large-framed, hard-faced, ungainly man, but to Madge he looks like an angel of mercy, as he catches the waiter, who is banging the gong, by the shoulder and propels him several yards away from that instrument of horror. There is hope in his energetic manner ; there is a promise of life in his wrath at the untoward row ! In another moment the prettiest girl Dr. Vincent has seen for many a long day is lifting an eager, supplicating face to him, as she questions him about Phil.

He is an elderly man, one who has been accustomed to witness every form and degree of anxiety that the probable approach of death, the destroyer, can cause. As he glances keenly down into the up-turned face, he words his conviction :


“ You are not his sister ? ”

“No, no ; that was his sister you passed on the stairs,” Madge answers, impatiently ; and then Dr. Vincent scans her companion, Mrs. Henderson, and says, coolly, it seems to them both,—

“Come into the saloon,” and as soon as he has got them there he cuts off all the rough edges of his manner, and adds, very kindly,—

“Mr. Fletcher is no longer hopelessly ill.” Then, as Madge collapses under the suddenness of the relief, and subsides on to an ottoman, he says,—


“That’s right ; take it quietly, and I’ll tell you all I know about the case ; it’s the old story—incessant mental labour, incessant failure, incessant alternations of hope and despair ; it’s the history of the majority of literary men—the many fail, the one succeeds ; the recognised term is the only one that expresses the nature of the disease—he’s ‘broken down.’”



They learn now, what they have never known before—that Phil has been a press-man and magazinist for years. That he has been successful as far as success goes, successful in a way that has stimulated him to go on labouring without cessation for the gain that was so needful. Then had come a time when the strain began to be painful, “when, if it could have been relaxed, all would have been well with him,” the doctor thought ; “and he has had some shock outside his professional career,” Dr. Vincent adds, looking steadily at Madge, “and the result of it was that he broke down with a crash ; but I see hope for him to-day ; and now I’ll go up and speak to his sister.”

As he leaves them, Madge looks almost supplicatingly at Mrs. Henderson.

“Are you not going to say anything ?” she asks.



Mrs. Henderson shakes her head. "Silence is golden in such cases as yours, my dear," she says.

"Are you not going to think anything?" Madge persists.

"You know that the sweetest-natured, brightest malcontent that ever existed came to the conclusion that 'nought is worth a thought, and I'm a fool for thinking!' Shall I tell you that I have come to the same conclusion, Madge?"

"You may—and I won't believe you; you're worrying yourself about the way in which you shall make me 'see a little' of the hope that dear old doctor sees—just a glimpse of it, not enough to make me too expectant, but just a ray."

Mrs. Henderson shakes her head in a feebly negative manner.

"After what you saw of his mother's deep



affliction and awful anxiety yesterday, you wouldn't be Madge if you were not sighing to see such a ray, even if you did not know poor Phil at all ; that is all natural, to be looked for, indeed ; but how about the impression it may create in Phil's mind ? he will not realise that it is only sympathy with his mother that has brought you to him now.”

“Can't I explain that by-and-by, if he ever lives to ask me ?” Madge says, with a shiver.

“Don't stay here splitting straws ; go up, and bring me fuller news than Chrissy will ; and if he wakes, and knows you, say that I am here.”

It is a tremendous responsibility, and Mrs Henderson has vivid recollections of the many vows she has made never again to assume any responsibility at all in connection

with these two young people. But kindly-heartedness carries the day against prudence, as it is always meet and right that it should, and in place of the stern refusal which she ought to word, she says,—

“Here! and ready to take up the burden of all that your being here means?”

“Yes—exactly, it won’t be a burden though; don’t look as if you were afraid that I am going to confer the honour of myself on anyone who hasn’t asked me.”

So sped on her mission by Madge, Mrs. Henderson is arrested in it by meeting with Chrissy and the Doctor on the stairs. Chrissy is crying industriously, with the earnestness that is characteristic of the woman who has forcibly learnt the lesson that it behoves her to do all things thoroughly. And over Doctor Vincent’s hard visage there is spread a film of pity.

In her dread of it, in her repugnance to it in her agonized sense of its being capriciously unjust, Mrs. Henderson craves eagerly for “news.”

“What is it? tell me?”

“We shall soon have that fine young fellow off the sick-list, the doctor says, cheerfully, pulling off his true expression as easily as if it had been a mask; and then, as he bowed good-by to them, Chrissy becomes a mere inert mass of over-wrought affectionate feeling, as she sobs out,—

“He is better and will get over this; but *how* will he bear the truth I have just heard?”

“What is it? Chrissy, just listen! whatever tidings of sorrow you have to give, Madge Roden will suffer in hearing them, more than anyone else; remember that.”

“Oh! how can I,” poor Chrissy cries, “I’m

his sister, and have been proud of him from the day he began taking care of us ; I can't remember the time he didn't take care of us : don't talk of anyone else's sorrow—I'm his sister."

"And you're overcome by learning that though he will live he may be long in recovering ?" Mrs. Henderson questions.

"No, no, not that ; but who wouldn't be overcome by hearing that, though he will recover his health perfectly, please God, his brain will never be able to stand what it *has* stood ? he must rest, and take things easily, the doctor said ; and I know what that means ; and Phil's brain-work has been his life."

"And it will be a large portion of his life again, when another portion of which you know nothing is made clear, and straight before him." Then in her fear that she has

said too much—said enough to compromise Madge—Mrs. Henderson grows unreasonable and imperious after her own benevolent fashion.

“Go to your room at once, and stay there until I send for you ; meanwhile I will stay with Phil.”

“That’s very kind, though the nurse seems a most excellent person, and I should think could be thoroughly trusted ; but what will Miss Roden do ? ”

Clearly Chrissy has not quite comprehended that indiscreet statement about Madge suffering more than anyone else, in hearing evil tidings of Phil. The sister’s anxiety for her brother is of a sort that no other, no mere acquaintance of yesterday, such as Miss Roden is, can possibly have a share in, or understand in any way. “His brain-work has been his life,” poor Chrissy says, piteously.

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And in her heart she knows that it has been their life too. The good son and brother! She, knowing him well, knows how it will be with him, when with returning health there will be no returning mental vigour. "Don't think me weak and ungrateful for him," she pleads, apologetically, "but he will think so much of mamma! Mabel and I are young and capable, but—mamma——"

She breaks off, briefly trying to wipe away the despondent tears that well out so quickly, and Mrs. Henderson, as it were, sweeps Chrissy away out of the public saloon, to the room which she has apportioned to her.

"Crying, and a cold bath, and some dinner by-and-by, will refresh you, dear Chrissy, and as soon as you're refreshed you'll scout the idea of your brother being one atom less able in any way than he ever has been; we will take care that he does not go into harness again

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too soon ; now mind that you follow out all my directions ; cry by all means if you like, but don't forget to dine.”

Two minutes after this Mrs. Henderson is bending down looking at the still sleeping man. The fever has raged over him like a burning blast. She marks that in a moment, as he lies there unconscious, but at rest, at ease, with the pores of his skin, and all his muscles and joints relaxed again from that cruel, scorching strain which has been upon them so long. His hair has been shaved on the temples, and cut close all over his head. There are lines visible between the round of the cheek and the heavy drooping moustache. The hand that lies outside the counterpane is attenuated and nerveless. He looks six or seven years older than he did the night of the Winstaple ball, when he came up to claim Madge for the promised

few words that he had begged her to wait for. She realizes it all—all the inevitable changes that a furious fever of the mind and body make in a man. He has been through a fiery furnace, and the marks of it are still upon him. Whether they will ever be effaced under the sweet softening influence of an atmosphere of satisfied love and freedom from anxiety, remains to be proved.

In her pitifulness for the avowed and acknowledged sufferer she does not forget that unacknowledged one who is awaiting her below, in the gaunt, unhomelike-looking saloon. And so she goes back to find Madge the object of much thought and consideration to the scattered groups who have come back from the *table d'hôte*, to spend a distrustful evening together.

Most of the current distrust is felt about Madge. Apparently she, "a young and





moderately good-looking girl,” as more than one of her surveyors and assessors says to herself, “is here in this very public place alone.” It has been remarked, that she does not wear a wedding-ring, and that she does not appear desirous of apologizing for her existence, nor at all embarrassed by a sense of her solitude among them. Her clear, undrooping eyes rove over each one as he or she enters. And the majority of those who enter, fidget under the gaze, and conceive an instantaneous and faint aversion to the gazer. Unconscious of the fact, that the self-possessed girl—who never by so much as a gesture of impatience or nervousness, betrays that she is vibrating with anxiety,—does not see anything just now but a long future of remorseful misery for herself, if Phil should never come out of the valley of the Shadow of Death.

As Mrs. Henderson comes swiftly across from the door, Madge starts from her half-recumbent position on a sofa, and asks aloud, without the slightest regard for other people being present,—

“How is he? does he know I am here?”

With half a glance, Mrs. Henderson takes in the meaning smiles that are being smiled to the right and left of her—takes them in, and smarts under them. But Madge does not even see them. “How is he?” she repeats impatiently; “have you been talking to him all this long time you’ve been away?”

The answers are given with rapidity now. What there is to tell Mrs. Henderson tells quickly,—the story tells as they go out and walk up and down the esplanade, between the hotel and the sea.

It is late, and the moon is sailing over the

water, and millions of stars are brightening the sky, by the time the tale—told with many a tender interpretation and addition—has come to an end. And Madge hears it all in wrapt silence, with downcast eyes, and drooping head. For her “there is no light in heaven or earth,” during the first few moments after the possibility, which is so appalling, has been put before her: the possibility that Phil may never be restored to those who love him, as those who love him must crave to see him.

“I have told you all the worst—the worst that *may* be,” Mrs. Henderson says, after a long interval, during which poor Madge has kept silence with her lips, but has been crying aloud in her soul. “I have told you all the worst that may be; and now, Madge, what will you do? it will wear your spirit down, poor child, to stay here, and be told of

hourly fluctuations which you may not witness ; will you go home to-morrow, dear, and wait the issue ? ”

“ No,” Madge says, and she has to collect all her strength to utter even that one word. But the utterance breaks the spell of mingled awe and pain which has been chaining her for several minutes. And presently she finds words to say,—

“ No ; ” I will wait for him here ; however he may come to me, whether as a lover, or as a friend only, he shall know that I have not been ashamed to show the interest I feel in him. I will wait for him here.”

“ But, Madge,” Mrs. Henderson begins protesting, as a dozen complications arise and present themselves in all their native ugliness before her mental vision ; “ has Phil never given you to understand clearly that he loves you ? is it a doubt of him that is weighing

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upon you? because, let me assure you, that he has told me——”

“Oh! he’s told me ten times more than ever he can have told you or anyone else,” Madge interrupts; “it’s no doubt of him as he was; it’s the doubt that the doctor has put before us in awfully veiled language; it’s the doubt that he may come out of this another man, with his love for me burnt out of him, with lowered aspirations about everything.”

“Would you care for him still if this possible worst were the case?” Mrs. Henderson asks.

“Care for him! yes, to the end of my life, even if he’s broken down more thoroughly than I’ll let myself think he will be. I shall always find my hero in Phil; but he may remember that none of this would have happened if I had not said some biting words

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one day under a delusion. And, as he didn't know what my delusion was, those words may have rankled and corroded all care for me out of his heart."

"Then you wish to stay here?" Mrs. Henderson says, disregarding this burst. She knows that it is the offspring of keen, faithful, self-reproach which is exaggerating everything. "I've no doubt but that the dear child is picturing him to herself as a mild, and melancholy incapable, to whom she may devote herself in her bloom and brightness, and so expiate her sin of non-acceptance of him at the first. Poor Madge! Thank heaven the reality in this case is likely to be far better than the romance. Still, she's right in a measure. He will never be the 'man he was' again—though he may be something infinitely better and worthier."

"Yes: I wish to stay here. I promised

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his mother to write to her by every post, and I shall do it.”

“And now it seems to me that supper would be better for you than moonlight, Madge.”


“I think so, too,” Madge answers, promptly, though all her being revolts at the idea of food, until she has heard how he takes the news of her being near him of her own choice and will. So they turn and walk towards the entrance-door, and as they gain it, a blaze of light falls upon a group that is entering by the opposite door, the one facing the town.

There is a certain sparkle and excitement about the ones who are coming in, and the manager and waiters who are revolving round them. An ordinary travelling party too, apparently. A gentleman and lady, man and wife evidently, bride and bridegroom

presumably, followed by a valet, and a maid, and a van-load of imperials and trunks.

The lady stands in the centre of the hall for a minute or two, waiting, while her husband gives directions to the manager. Madge's eyes rest listlessly on the new comer, who is fair, slender, exquisitely dressed, and steeped in an atmosphere of self-satisfied consciousness. Her eyes meet Madge's with a half look of recognition, as the thought goes through her mind, "I've seen that face before." Then, as Madge passes on and goes upstairs with no recognition in her eyes, the lady calls to her husband.

"Did you see that pretty girl who passed in, while you were speaking to that other man?" she says, as she passes her arm through his and he leads her on to the private sitting-room they have engaged. And then, as he answers "No," she adds, "I





wish you would go back and find out who she is ?—I know I’ve seen her before.”

He speeds on his mission, and comes back with the intelligence that “the young lady is Miss Roden.”

“Ah ! then I *have* seen her face in Olive Aveland’s photograph album,” the lady says.

Meanwhile, one or two pertinent questions are being asked both of valet and maid, as to the reason why “the late arrivals, being, as they are, husband and wife, do not bear the same name ?”

“My lady having the superior rank as well as all the money choose to keep it to herself,” the maid says, and the man further explains very kindly and clearly,—

“*He* haven’t a brass farthing ; my lady provides everything for him, just as if he was a real swell—she provides *me*, and so of

course she has her own way about her title, and quite right too."

"This young man belonged to the household in my late lord's time," the female portion of the domestic chorus graciously adds, as she reflects, "Who's to know here that he was only a 'sir;' my lady couldn't be called higher if he had been a lord."

"Only one of the 'ousehold, eh?" the man responds, thoughtfully, "really, now, there's no knowing what any of us may come to."

## CHAPTER XI.

### HOW OLIVE HEARS IT.

MADGE's departure leaves a very dull blank in Olive Aveland's life. The hours filled as they are with the thoughts of Philip, and the expectation which is continually being disappointed, of seeing him—drag heavily along. Sometimes, when the burden of them becomes almost unbearable, the girl is half inclined to wish herself back in the uncongenial atmosphere of Barr and Battle's showroom. But when his letters come, breathing, as they do something of life in a higher social scale, she rejoices that she is free of it and its associations, and prizes her £100 a

year, which enables her to keep herself apart, more than ever for Philip's sake.

It is just about this time that Philip pays a visit to his relations in the little street in Chelsea, and hears for the first time of his cousin Phil's serious illness.

Philip from his boyhood has been wont to come to these relations of his, and inflict either his high spirits or his low spirits upon them whenever it has pleased him. Further, he has never thought it necessary to offer the smallest explanation as to the cause of either. And though in their sympathetic hearts they have often yearned to know the reason why, they have been taught to refrain "from bothering him," in a perfect way that does credit to his talent as a teacher.

It is a long, long time since they have seen him, and gloomy as he appears, they give him a cordial greeting, and then gulp out

with loving pain—with loving reliance on his perfect sympathy also—the story of Phil’s physical downfall. At the same time, with a delicacy he does not deserve, they abstain from making any mention of Madge Roden.

He has always been fond of his cousin in a way, and now at this juncture he feels specially affected by the ill news concerning him. “There is always some hitch or other, in everything that concerns me,” he says complainingly. But they, Phil’s mother and sister, forgive the selfishness of his complaint, for they notice that his face has blanched, and his eyes reddened when he hears of Phil’s extremity.

“Tell us about yourself, Philip,” Mabel suggests; “don’t think that our misery about Phil makes us careless of you, dear; it did grieve us so much when we saw Sir John Tollington’s death! such a nice appointment as you

found it ; and appointments are so hard to get——”

She pauses suddenly, arrested in her sympathetic prosings by a queer expression of mingled amusement and embarrassment which flits over Philip's face.

“I'm not thinking about another appointment,” he says, hesitatingly. “I've come to tell you something, which you'll be very glad to hear, I know. I am going to marry Lady Tollington, and you may congratulate me very warmly, for I am a very lucky fellow, I can tell you.”

“My dear Philip ! I do indeed,” bursts from them both. But somehow there is unintentionally more amazement than delight in their accents, for Philip's face belies his words when he says he “is a very lucky fellow.”

Mabel presses him with questions presently,

and he answers them with a fair amount of enthusiasm. "She looks quite young," he says, refraining from dating her ladyship, "very fair and delicate looking ; she's considered a remarkably pretty woman, and no one can doubt her attachment to me, for she will gain nothing by the move."

"She has a little money, then," Mrs. Fletcher remarks in a tone of pleased surprise ; "I am glad to hear it. Naval men, as a rule, can't leave their wives very well off."

"She has one of the finest properties in the Highlands," Philip says, trying not to let his voice ring with exultation, "besides a good income from funded property."

"When shall we see her, Philip ?" Mabel asks, anxiously.

Philip winces. "Well, to tell the truth she rather wishes the engagement to be kept

quiet just at present. You see Sir John has not been dead the traditional twelve months that are conventionally devoted to widowed despair ; and the world is so narrow-minded it won't remember how unnatural it would be for May to mourn for December in reality."

"Then you won't be married just yet?"

"In about a fortnight," Philip says, awkwardly ; "when once we are married every one may hear of it, but we both rather wish to be spared the preliminary pulling to pieces."

"Then we shall not see Mrs. Philip Fletcher, I suppose, until you come back to town after your bridal tour?"

Now it must be understood that though Philip's affection for these relatives of his does not equal theirs for him, he has a thorough and perfect respect for their integrity, their honourable conscientiousness, and



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their just judgment. He is desperately deficient in all these qualities himself, but he respects them in "his people." Farther, he has a hearty, thorough deep-seated contempt for his bride-elect. And so he has no desire to submit himself to the ordeal of their meeting with and sounding her.

Accordingly he says,—

"Town won't see us till next season, I fancy, then of course we shall look you up directly we arrive; we go west first, and then on the continent for a few weeks, and we shall try the winter at Auchtarroch."

"Is that the name of her place, Philip?" Mabel asks. And on the subject of the property Philip waxes eloquent. He can speak of Auchtarroch and the money that is in the funds without fear or shame.

"Well," Mabel says when her cousin has made a ground plan of the Auchtarroch

property on the table with books and reels of cotton for their benefit. "I shall write and offer my cousinly congratulations to your bride the day you're married. I'll be one of the first to wish her joy under her new name, Philip."

"She won't have a new name," Philip says, stumbling over his words, and upsetting the plan of Auchtarroch by pushing his chair back suddenly and jerking the table, "she will still keep her title—be Lady Tollington!"

"Oh! why! he was only a knight," Mabel says, "and I am sure the name of Fletcher is as good as that of Tollington," Mrs. Fletcher says, flushing rosy red at the intended slight to the family patronymic. I'm sure if I were in your case, Philip, I would not agree to my wife bearing another man's name."

Philip gets up petulantly: it is always a

temper-trying thing to have other people wording your feelings, when you have already proved yourself powerless to get those feelings attended to.

"Never mind his having been only a knight, Mabel ; I think, aunt, that I am bound to concede something—such a trifle too—to a woman who gives so much and will get only my worthless self in return." Then he stoops to kiss them both, and say "good-bye," and they understand pretty well that they are seeing the last of Philip—for he will want nothing more of them !

During the fortnight that follows this announcement, Lady Tollington, whose town circle is not a large one, drags her handsome young betrothed round it, until he is giddy. But he reels along without a single demur. His time will set in when the vows are spoken, and the ring is on. ' Lady Tolling-

ton's airs of being a great enchantress, will die a sudden death then, though he submits to them patiently enough now, for he has no intention of seeing Auchtarroch slip through his fingers, as the Moorbridge property did. His greatest trouble as he is whirled along, is that Olive may see him.

At last he has the common humanity to cease writing to Olive. Purposely he has filled his two latest letters with misty allusions to "inevitable changes," and "stern necessities." But he has been unable (he is as great a coward as he is a liar) to tell her what the change is, and why he makes it. "She will hear it soon enough," he tells himself, and his false heart aches as he pictures that woman's anguish when she does hear it.

The marriage day comes, and Lady Tollington, in the midst of all the excitement of

dressing, has time to write one letter. Her dress is just as grey as a pearl! (“No one shall say I was absurd enough to be married a second time *in white*,” she says to her maid) and this dress is covered with Mechlin lace, that falls about her in such graceful folds as to make her appear a very pretty woman when she practises “the glide” up the centre of Saint George’s.

She is rather particular about this letter. She will not trust it to the post, but sends it by private messenger just before she goes to the church. “And be sure he leaves word that I was on the point of starting to be married when I wrote it!” she says, giving a final direction; “if one does a Christian thing, do it thoroughly.”

The bridal pair need not be followed. The letter and its recipient are far more interesting.

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Olive is sitting alone, alone as usual; alone with her own dreary thoughts when that letter is handed to her. A golden monogram gleams at her from the envelope. A golden crest and quarterings, and motto flame at her from the top of the epistle. A heavy perfume diffuses itself from the paper generally as she opens it and reads,

“MY DEAR MISS AVELAND :

“ Since my late lamented husband’s death I have thought deeply on the subject of our mutual misunderstanding. The death of a friend purifies and clears the mind. I see now that we misjudged each other; and as I desire to be at peace with everyone on this happy day, I write to tell you that you have my best wishes for your future happiness and prosperity. Doubtless you will have heard from Philip of our engagement? he has, I

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know, a sincere friendship for you. We ratify this engagement this morning. I pen these lines just before starting for Saint George's, Hanover Square. By the time you read this I shall be Philip Fletcher's wife. But if you write to congratulate me, address me as ‘Lady Tollington.’ I retain my title.

“Your sincere friend and well-wisher,  
“JULIE TOLLINGTON.”

She reads every word of it. More than this, she fully takes in the meaning of every word. And then for an hour!—Heaven help us, too many of us go through such hours as these. There is no need to write about them.

At the end of that hour she moves from the position she has never altered once during all the time, and the words,

“She hath a devil,” fall from her lips.

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Some few days after this, as Olive is trying to make out what she will do with the rest of her life, Griffiths Poynter comes in.

“Of course it’s you,” she says, scarcely turning her head, but putting out her hand instantly (he notices that) to welcome him. “Of course it’s you ; no one else would come at the right time.”

“Have I come at the right time ! Olive——”

“Oh ! don’t think that, *please*,” Olive interrupts ; “I mean that no one but you would come just when I was wanting to speak to a fellow-creature about what I am to do with my life.”

“What you’re to do with it !” he repeats wonderingly.

“Yes—don’t look perplexed ; it’s quite a common occurrence, I assure you, that a woman should feel the need of a definite plan



of life while she lives, however little she may desire to live at all. Griffiths!" she adds, suddenly handing him the letter which Lady Tollington so carefully constructed on her bridal day. "Griffiths! read that; the man she speaks of is the man I have loved ever since I was capable of loving anyone outside the circle of my relations and my dolls; read that! and then tell me what I can do with what's left of my life."

He reads it in a paroxysm of pity, love, and indignation. And when he has finished it, he says—nothing!

"Why don't you speak?" she asks presently.

"There is nothing left to say," he says humbly.

"I knew that. There is nothing left to say, and there is nothing left to do; and still I shall go on for perhaps another forty years; isn't it awful?"

Roused out of all the reticence he has been vowing to observe, Griffiths is goaded into saying,

“Forget the hound ! how can you allow yourself to believe that you’ll go on thinking about him ?”

“Why don’t you forget me ?—why do you allow yourself to think so kindly of me still that you keep on coming to try and comfort me, and do me good ? why do you do it ?—you’re weaker than I am, for I never even pretend to love you, and Philip did—does love me with his whole heart.”

“Oh, Olive !” he says pleadingly, “why will you speak these horrible truths ? they’re not ‘ truths ’ either, for if you were married, dear, I’d never allow myself to think of you ; while now I love you so, that I’ll ask you, pray you, to let me take care of the life you value so lightly——”

"What a pity it is I can't do it!" she interrupts. "I know that it would be such a comfortable arrangement, and I know that I should always like you into the bargain, Griffiths; but I wouldn't marry a man I disliked even, much less you; and after all, what is it?" she strives to say calmly. "I shall only add one more to the long list of thrown-aside women; do believe me, it's all over."

"I do believe you," he says; and then he goes away to follow out his path in life, which will from this moment diverge widely from hers.

"At least, I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have been candid with him throughout," she thinks, as she hears his footsteps reverberating for the last time on the staircase; "but he is my last friend."

The woman who says these words is in the bloom of her youth, and has probably (as she

has just suggested), a long lease of life before her still. As we look at her, her young head bent in dogged, faithful, despairing regret, let us remember, pitifully, that this life will in all human probability be spent alone. For the only one whose advent could rejoice her, can never come to Olive Aveland.

## CHAPTER XII.

### INTO THE SILENT POOL.

A soft, low-lying purple haze hangs over everything; it has been intensely hot all day, and the evening breeze has not sprung up yet. By and by when the sun (now making a sea of heather on fire in the west) has quite set, it will be refreshing, but just now the air is caressing and lulling, rather than bracing, and one likes to be silent and still in it.

They are on the borders of Exmoor again, and Exmoor is in great glory now. The purple heather, and the waxlike pink heath, are clothing every bit and boulder of the great uncultivated moor; the streams are

swollen by the late rains, and the bracken is beginning to change to that golden brown which harmonises so well with the purple heather.

Phil Fletcher has advanced so far towards recovery as to be at the stage of being considered invalid enough to be the chief object of consideration to all his friends, and well enough to avail himself of their attentions. But this stage, so delightful to a woman, is one that speedily palls upon a man. In short, Phil is still sufficiently ill to need a great deal of attention, and sufficiently well and true to his sex to be worried by it.

The old order of things, the order that had been established just before Madge and Phil went forth on that riding expedition, during which the scales fell from their eyes concerning each other, was re-established now, just as though it had never been interrupted.

Once more Madge is back in her own home, regulating the daily round of life in Moorbridge House, as she always has regulated it since first she took the reins into her own hands; and once more Phil is the Hendersons' guest, and once more it is an understood thing that the occupants of the two houses are to be rarely apart.

Chrissy has gone back to her home duties, for Phil no longer has need of the sisterly care and devotion which Chrissy gave him, and which has made Chrissy very dear to Madge Roden. And so once more the two young people are necessarily thrown together a great deal, but still, wonderfully as he has rallied, Phil has evidently not quite recovered his former energy yet. He accepts the fact of being almost perpetually in Madge's presence with evident pleasure, but he does not take advantage of it. As he says himself sometimes

to Mrs. Henderson, "All he desires now is to rest on his oars until he dare venture out to sea again." Of course he says this openly in reference to the exertion of that brain-power which has failed him once, but it applies to other adventures also. Of all the shipwrecks which he dreads, a repetition of that one wherein he was so sadly battered on the observatory, would be the worst for him.

From the first moment of his convalescence, at Ilfracombe, he has been accustomed to see Madge's graceful figure, and Madge's blithe face about him. He is accustomed to be the recipient of dainty kindnesses and attentions from her that the others never think of rendering him. "It is her nature to be kind, and to try to give pleasure. If the pleasure she gives this man is a little too exquisite, she is not to blame; she merely obeys her instincts—shines and dazzles him; but



though he is dazzled he is not going to presume on his privileges again." He tells himself these truths often, and his heart forebodes that when the exquisite pleasure ceases, a more exquisite pain will be his portion.

He has heard from Mrs. Henderson of Madge's anxiety and sympathy for him and with his people, when the news of his illness first reached her. But Mrs. Henderson has been careful to tell the tale calmly, and in a matter-of-course way. "It was too kind of you both to come down with my sister," Phil had said when the recital came to a close. And Mrs. Henderson had merely answered, "My dear boy, considering all things *I* could have done no less, and Madge couldn't have remained in London without me."

Phil was not in the mood at this time to take advantage of or even to be made hopeful by anything like encouragement on the

subject of his love. But it did dishearten him to hear this solution given of the sweet mystery Madge's being there had been to him. It disheartened him so, that at first he refused Mrs. Henderson's invitation to go back to Halsworthy with her. He knew himself that "it would be useless for him even to put his fate to the touch again; he had no intention of ever doing so; still to have the inutility of anything of the kind pointed out to him was hard—and was unnecessarily hard."

Nevertheless, when the time came he did go back to Halsworthy, where he is this gorgeous August day reading a letter he has just received from his cousin Philip.

A fortnight ago, Phil heard of his cousin's marriage from one of his sisters, but up to the present time he has said nothing about it. He has an undefined idea that Madge Roden will not like to hear of it; and though

Madge Roden is nothing to him—never can be anything to him—he shrinks (not unnaturally) from the thought of seeing her pained by another man's marriage.

But this letter makes him comprehend clearly that he can shun the subject no longer. Philip tells his cousin in an affectedly easy way (Phil almost fancies he sees the falsity of that ease in the wavering strokes of the pen that has palpably not been the pen of a ready writer) that "Lady Tollington has expressed such a desire to see that part of Exmoor that he (Philip) does not feel justified in permitting any associations of his own to thwart her." "Look out for us, therefore, in a day or two," he concludes; "I know there is a decent inn in Halsworthy—and I know that Miss Roden is far too sensible a girl to imagine that there is anything like a vaunt in my coming."

Phil is sitting on a chair on the Hendersons' lawn as he reads this, and just as he comes to a conclusion, Mrs. Henderson strolls slowly out from the dining-room window and comes across to join him.

"Your correspondence absorbs you this morning, Phil," she says. And then she ventures on to a topic that has never been broached since his illness: "Are you behind-hand with 'copy,' poor boy, and are they worrying you?"

"Oh, no!" Phil answers quite cheerfully, in a way that makes Mrs. Henderson's heart thump with relief. "I got into harness some days ago, and—there's not such a demand for me," he adds with a laugh, "that I need burst my brains to supply it."

"Got into harness some days ago—wasn't that rather soon—wasn't it rash?"

She asks it with a ring of such genuine

anxiety in her voice that Phil, instead of answering "Oh, no! I don't think so" (in a way that half admits the accusation, as people usually do who are charged with rashness in a friendly way) says,—

"What makes you say that?—you're not a croaker from an empty sense of civility."

"No, I am not; I mean it thoroughly. I put it to your common-sense, Are you not rash in flinging yourself into arduous brain-work again before your brain has properly recovered its spring and balance?"

"I hope not," he says gravely; "I understand what you mean, and fear, now; don't think me idly rash; I know that it has been touch and go with me. Mrs. Henderson, the pressure upon me for the last few months has been intolerable; it is well for me that I gave way physically; it was inevitable that there should be a crash somewhere; you see

I fell into the whirl of feeling that if I paused for a moment—if I was not at the wheel constantly—that there would be wreck and confusion in my life, and not in my life only but in the lives of others; that was one cause,—”

“ And there was another ? ” Mrs. Henderson interposes.

“ There was ; but I’m not going to talk of that now : don’t distress yourself about me. I’m out of the whirl ; the enforced inaction and quiet of the last few weeks have wrought the good work of teaching me that I shall do more if I go at it coolly than if I work at white-heat, but work I must—you know that.”

Having got him on the topic, she, with a woman’s adroitness, keeps him to it, till she has got him to express his regret that he should ever have been led into the folly of

relinquishing his clerkship, and trusting wholly to literature and tutoring for a livelihood. And at last he adverts to another folly.

“It wasn’t disappointed ambition that made me lose my head eventually,” he says ; “I made a mistake one day when I was here last, and Miss Roden acted the part of a true friend, and told me of my fault and folly in a way that in curing pretty nearly killed.”

“Madge told me she had made a mistake in imagining you to be engaged to Miss Westcott,” Mrs. Henderson says quietly. Then she resolves that she will not add another ingredient to the potent charm of that statement, but will let it seethe and seethe in his mind, unadulterated with any minor matter. So she turns from the topic with easy determination, just as he feels that it would be Paradise to pursue it.

"You waved your letter at me when I came up in a way that made me think there was something in it that I was to hear?"

"So there is : Philip has married Lady Tollington."

"That woman whose husband died two or three months ago?"

"The same : I heard of it from Chrissy a fortnight ago, but I didn't care to speak of it ; and here's worse to follow ; he writes to me himself now, saying that they are coming here in a few days ; how will Miss Roden take it ?"

"Madge is too well-bred to show her contempt for them ; you needn't be alarmed either on their account or hers."

"It's the woman making him come—I'm sure of that," Phil says, waxing wrath ; "I can't stop them—the Inn is open to man and



beast; Miss Roden will be justified in thinking lowly indeed of the Fletcher family.”

“She will never identify you with your cousin in any way, be sure of that,” Mrs. Henderson says. And then she adds impressively, “The difference between you two men was clear to Madge at a time when it must have given her pain—at a time when she was paying the penalty of my mistake and her own; don’t distress yourself about what Madge will feel in seeing your cousin.”

There is more satisfaction for Phil after this in his rides with Madge Roden. There is more satisfaction for him in the frank, unaffected way in which she shows her pleasure in his society, and her joy in his rapidly returning health. Those bitter words of hers that had rankled in his mind so long, had been

uttered under a delusion ! She had believed him to be engaged to great, good-natured Miss Westcott, and the belief had made her bitter. There is no longer pain and humiliation to Phil in the memory of them, now that he knows the cause of them.

She hears the news of Philip's marriage with Lady Tollington with an amount of incredulity that staggers Phil for a while. He cannot help feeling that her unwilling belief—her surprise—her evident distress—betokens some smouldering fire of regard for Philip. But presently she undeceives him.

They are alone riding through the blooming purple heather as she does it, on the free wild border of the Moor. As they pull up on the brow of a slope and look away over the wide expanse of undulating ground, the desire to be as open as the scene possesses her.

256    "‘HE COMETH NOT,’ SHE SAID."

"Shall I tell you why I am heart-sore and horrified to hear of Philip's marriage with Lady Tollington?" she asks, laying her whip on his arm to command his attention.

"Heart-sore!" the words hurt him.

"Yes—so heart-sore, and hurt! oh! Phil, I don't think even you will understand how I dread what is before me. I shall have to tell this news to some one else who may die of it."

Her own voice melts into tears as she says this. And then clearly, sadly, and mercifully she tells him the story of Olive Aveland and his cousin.

They grow very sympathetic and confidential over the plans for the preservation of everybody's peace of mind, and finally Madge says,

"I tell you what it is, Phil! as soon as Lady Tollington (disgusting of a woman not

to call herself by her husband's name) is tired of exhibiting her last purchase here—as soon as ever they are gone you must go up and bring Olive down to me ; she shall see more of Griffiths Poynter, she shall learn how much better he is worth living for, than Philip is worth dying for.”

This is the last definite plan they make this afternoon before going home. The next morning's post brings a letter that upsets it altogether.

Madge is the recipient of this letter, and with a sorrowful face, and a throbbing heart, she takes it to Mrs. Henderson and Phil at once.

“ Read it,” she says, sobbing ; “ what shall we do ? ”

The letter is from Olive. It is very simple, very short, very eloquent of the girl's smarting condition.

253     " ' HE COMETH NOT,' SHE SAID."

" DEAR MADGE :

" You have told me often to come to you in any trouble. My trouble is come now in the shape of the feeling that I'm utterly desolate. I shall be at Moorbridge House to-morrow, if you will have me. I'm not dying ; but I have neuralgia in the soul and mind and heart. Will you have me ?

" Your affectionate

" OLIVE."

" She knows it," Phil says ; " you will be spared that, you will not have to tell her, she knows it already."

" But she may see him here—don't you see the new misery ? " Madge cries.

" She must not see him ; we must all combine to avoid that complication," Phil says quickly. " I should think that a word to Philip, when he comes, will be sufficient to send him straight away again."

"It won't be sufficient to send Lady Tollington straight away again," Madge says, with an impatient shake of her head. "I have heard something of her from Olive already; she is a clever fool."

"One thing is certain, as we don't know where they are, we must wait until they come here to make an appeal to their better feelings, if they have any; besides, let us hope that we are magnifying the evil; Olive, when she comes under our influence, may be persuaded to find her hero in Griffiths Poynter," Mrs. Henderson says hopefully. But Madge only shakes her head more despondingly than before; she has heard Olive speak of Philip, and the hope Mrs. Henderson has put forth does not lighten Madge's breast for a moment.

It is late in the afternoon of the day following this on which this discussion took place, when Olive reaches the haven of peace

she has selected. Madge meets her at the little road-side hostelry, where the coach horses bait, and carries her back in the little snug brougham to Moorbridge House. There is nothing wanted in the tender thoughtfulness of Madge's manner. There is nothing wanting in the hearty fond welcome she gives this poor sad girl, who is so pitifully conscious of her weakness, and so utterly powerless to combat it. “You know that he is married!” are the first words Olive finds breath to utter. And Madge knows that she can say nothing! nothing that will by any chance alleviate this woman's pain.

Olive soon learns that Phil, that cousin Phil “of whom in the old days she heard so much, but whom she has never seen, is staying at the Hendersons. And she soon learns something else concerning him, though Madge says nothing more. “Her hero has

come," poor Olive thinks after looking wistfully at her bright-faced friend for a few moments. And then she feels she should like to see him.

"Madge, dear," she says, "let us walk down to Mrs. Henderson's—dear, kind, Mrs. Henderson—I want to see her as soon as possible."

Madge assents, indeed she rather catches at the idea. It is well that Olive should go there this evening, for after to-morrow her progress through the village might be an unsafe one, and liable to painful interruption. Accordingly they put on their hats, and white-faced Olive wraps a silver-grey cloud over her shoulders and the thick dull black silk dress (which had been of great efficacy in 'showing-off' various splendours at Barr and Battles, and which she now wears in memory of the uncle who has left her 100*l.* a year), and they saunter slowly down through the



grounds to the village. Then they go through the village street a little more hurriedly, and presently find themselves in the Vicarage garden, where Mrs. Henderson greets them with the words,—

“My girls, I was coming up to you with Phil ; why did you drag Olive out to-night, Madge ?”

It seems to Madge that Mrs. Henderson has some communication to make, that she is trying to send a telegram from her own eyes to Madge’s mind. But bewildered Madge can make nothing of it. Olive has the eye of a falcon, and sees presently what is going on.

“Do you want to speak to Madge alone ?” she asks abruptly, and Mrs. Henderson is so overwhelmed by the suddenness of the question, and by many other things, that she says, “Oh ! no, I was only afraid you were sitting in a draught.”

“And didn’t like to let me see that you thought I required care ; my dear Mrs. Henderson, if I heard anyone discuss the size of my coffin, and the quality of my shroud, it would have no effect on me.”

“But this is morbid, Olive !”

“Morbid ! it may : I only know it’s the case ; it would have no effect on me, for I don’t think for a moment that I shall die for many a long year. I’ve a weary time to go through yet ; I am young and strong—just as strong as I was when I was happy ; my pale face means nothing ; I am really strong. I may sit in this draught with impunity.”

There is something in the quiet recklessness of the girl’s tone and manner that actually hurts those who are listening to her. For diversion’s sake, Madge says,—

“Where is Phil ? I have told Olive that he is here.”

“Gone out,” is the brief answer.

“Let us go on your lovely lawn,” Olive says, rising up and passing out through the window; “how exactly it all is like what it used to be when I was here before, and my sorrow was sleeping. Oh! what sense and mercy there is in those words, ‘When sorrow sleepeth, wake it not.’ Mine has been roused up effectually; and oh, dear me, how many weary years it will have to be awake—I am so young and strong.”

Her words are not such as incline one to answer them. Therefore her two companions keep silence till they find themselves on the lawn. But Madge has managed to slip her hand through Olive’s arm, and give her a pressure that is as full of human love and sympathy, as the most eloquent words could be.

“Look at my *Osmunda regalis*,” Mrs.

Henderson says, pointing out a flourishing group of the royal monster fern ; " that dull, silent pool that I hated so much when I came here first, is turning out the most ornamental spot in my garden, now that it is fringed with these ferns. I used to be so dreadfully afraid that my children would tumble in ; but now they're growing up, its banks are the favourite family resort."

" So I should think," Olive says, " judging from the well-worn appearance of the rustic chairs." And then they all seat themselves on these chairs, which are placed on the smooth elastic turf close to the edge of the pond, and amuse themselves with looking at the reflection of the stars as they flash out, in the motionless, dark waters.

" It's sweet enough to induce one to sit here all night," Madge says ; " nevertheless

266    “ ‘HE COMETH NOT,’ SHE SAID.”

as soon as Phil comes in, he must be our escort home.”

\*           \*           \*           \*           \*

Meanwhile, the Halsworthy Inn is in a state of chaos. Lady Tollington and Mr. Fletcher have arrived, with their man and maid, and these two are making life a horrible burden to the flustered landlady by their dissatisfaction. Maddened by their complaints and suggestions, the worthy woman forgets her cunning, and overseasons some viands, and under-cooks others, and finally serves up a complete failure of three courses to a hungry, tired, and irritable pair.

“I shall not stay in this hole to be starved,” Lady Tollington says in fiery tones, as the last remnants of the ill-starred feast vanish from the table.

"The sooner we go, the better I shall be pleased," her husband rejoins; "you may do me the favour of remembering that I was opposed to coming here from the first."

"Absurd sentimentality, and false too," Lady Tollington says in a white rage, rising and going to the window; "you're weak enough, I know that; but I am not going to believe that you're weak enough to have any feeling left for this Miss Roden, who threw you off like an old glove directly she was tired of you, and had seen your cousin."

As Philip does not answer her, she is about to turn round with an unmistakable scowl on her fair, tired-looking face. But before she can do it, her glance is arrested by the sight of Olive Aveland and another young lady walking down the street. She guesses at once that they are going to the Vicarage, to see that Mrs. Henderson

of whom Philip has made frequent mention. And she resolves that she too, and Philip, shall follow with little delay.

Accordingly, a smile is the mask she wears, instead of a scowl, when she does turn round.

“Philip,” she begins, with the fawning air she can adopt at a moment’s notice ; “forgive my petulance, hunger is gnawing every bit of the courtier out of me ; accept the *amende* I am going to make : take me to see your friend, Mrs. Henderson ?”

Philip has nothing reasonable to urge against this request. He has not seen that graceful figure in the grey cloud, therefore he infinitely prefers the idea of going and having a pleasant evening at the Vicarage with Mrs. Henderson and his cousin Phil, and possibly Madge Roden, to that of spending the evening alone with his spouse in a dull village inn. One very soon comes to

the end of vivacious, vain Lady Tollington.

- And having come to the end of her, one has not the faintest desire to retrace one's steps.

Accordingly when the stars come out and jewel the skies, Lady Tollington puts on a youthful hat, and a "real cashmere," and Philip attends her with a careless indifference as to what will happen next, that will never be his portion again.

\* \* \* \* \*

The talk between the three women on the border of the silent, black pool, often flags ; but they sit on contentedly, for there is a certain pleasurable sense of rest to each one of them in being together in this way. Madge is by far the most silent of the three, and when she does speak it is only to wonder "Why Phil has not come back yet." When



she has expressed this wonder several times, she feels that an explanation is due to Olive. “Phil and I are going to be married soon,” she says ; and then she goes on to inform Olive that as he is going to the Bar his time must be principally spent in London. “And Aunt Lucy won’t be dull at all, because, luckily, Phil’s mother and sisters have agreed to come and live at Moorbridge House ; and we shall run down whenever Phil can spare time, for he won’t let me be away from my kingdom long.”

“Dear Madge,” Olive says affectionately, “how good it is when the real Happy Prince comes at last instead of at first.” And then she goes on to talk freely with Madge of the latter’s future, until it seems to both her hearers that her own heart has grown lighter.

The stars keep on breaking out on the sur-

face of the dark pool in greater beauty each moment, and the reflection of a splendid one gets broken and shattered into a myriad diamonds by the light ripple that is caused by the movement of the big fronds of the royal fern. In order to watch it Olive draws her chair nearer and nearer to the edge, and Mr. Henderson comes out, and they are all as much interested in the heavenly bodies as if there were no such things as false and absent lovers in the world.

Presently through the still night air the parlour-maid's voice comes to them saying, "My mistress and the young ladies are out on the lawn, sir," and now figures loom tall as they approach them in the star-light, and presently Philip Fletcher is in their midst, saying,—

"I have brought my wife to introduce to you, Mrs. Henderson."

It is all so sudden, it is so much like an awful nightmare from which if she moves she may free herself, that Olive does move, and does free herself, poor thing.

Forgetful of the water that is behind her, as she has turned her head to see him coming, she rises, steps back, and then there is a dull clashing sound in the pool, and Olive is no longer one of them.

Cry upon cry is raised, for the pool is known to be terribly deep, and the stars are twinkling confusedly on its broken surface. Philip Fletcher has not seen the face of the woman who has disappeared, but in the midst of the panic he only is prompt. He has sprung in before he knows what he is springing after.

Vain assistance is rendered to him by those who rush frantically round the margin, declaring that they are sure "she is rising there."

When she does rise it is far from the spot any one has indicated ; and when Philip, nearly exhausted himself, bears her to the bank in his arms, it is a dead face that the stars look down upon.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Such an awful thing to have happened on our wedding-tour,” Lady Tollington says ; “quite like a bad omen. I’ll never come near the West of England again.” Lady Tollington looks quite old as she says this to Mrs. Henderson, a day or two after the occurrence—old, and worn, and disappointed. And Mrs. Henderson, who does not know all the facts of the case, pities the living wife, who knows that she will never have a place in her husband’s heart, more than she does the dead love, who has done with all the toil and endeavour now.

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“For after all,” as Madge says to Phil the day before their own marriage, “he came to her at the last; she knew (I like to feel sure of that,) that he was trying to save her.”

THE END.

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